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Tomboys in Young Adult Fiction:

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Appearance and Reception of those 'Girls with  
Options'

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# 1. Introduction

In this thesis, gender norms, their perception and how they have changed over the last two and a half centuries will be examined by investigating the phenomenon of the tomboy. Our society has been based on strict separations between male and female features for a long time. Socialization processes assured that this fixed binary system was followed and supported by the majority:

The notion of 'gender roles' derives from the 1950s sociological construct 'sex roles.' As articulated by the Harvard sociologist Talcott Parsons, male and female sex roles were static and functioned complementarily for the well-being of (presumably, universal nuclear) families. Men's roles were 'instrumental' – they were rational breadwinners providing economic resources for families. Women, in contrast, had 'expressive' roles – they were nurturers, caretakers of the emotional well-being of husbands and children. Men inhabited the public, human-made, 'cultural,' business world; women and children, the 'natural' home and private world. (Leonardo 358)

Nevertheless, deviations from these normative 'sex or gender roles' have always existed. One of these deviations – the tomboy – will be examined here and taken as a point of reference in the observation of gender developments.

"[G]irls who see themselves as tomboys enjoy a varied set of activities and are not as gender-role bound in their preferences" (Plumb and Cowan 711), which makes these girls both, a threat to the established system as well as an opportunity for cultural development and a benchmark for increasing flexibility and freedom for women. That tomboys are a menace to the patriarchal concepts of men and women is signified by the prefix 'tom:' "In general, 'tom' connotes boyishness within women and some disruptive form of unconventional masculinity" (Halberstam 51). By exhibiting a 'disruptive,' and 'unconventional masculinity,' tomboys' behaviour differs from the 'normal' and 'conventional' way that is thought to be most suitable to assure a functioning and thriving society. However, "tomboys view themselves not as outcasts of their gender, but as girls with options" (Ahlqvist et al. 576) and as such, this thesis will treat them, too.

The method for this examination of tomboys and gender development is to firstly examine findings from empirical studies on tomboys. Secondly, these

findings serve as a basis for the analysis of three literary tomboys. As a third step, the tomboy protagonists will be investigated within their own historical context. The idea of this procedure is to show and compare three different viewpoints on tomboys and gender: the empirical, the literary and the historical perspective. Researchers have tried to define and identify tomboys and their behaviour since the second half of the twentieth century. Literature designs tomboy characters and therefore defines and distributes stereotypical images of them. Differences and similarities between research and literature and between contemporary definitions and the historical context of literary characters will yield interesting insights into the concept of the tomboy as well as the concept of gender.

The aim of this thesis is to show that gender boundaries are not as strict as they used to be and that ideas of normative gender-typical sets of behaviours will soften over time. It will be possible to observe a development towards higher gender-flexibility. This also means that behaviour that once used to be transgressive is not regarded as such any more in the twenty-first century. It is possible that through these considerable changes in the perception of gender, gender-transgressing terms like tomboy or sissy will even cease to exist.

The three novels which were chosen for an analysis of their literary representations of tomboys are: *Little Women* (1868) by Louisa May Alcott, *Famous Five on a Treasure Island* (1942) by Enid Blyton and *The Hunger Games* (2008) by Suzanne Collins. An interval of about 70 years between each publication facilitates the observation of gender developments. The publication date of *The Hunger Games* lies in the twenty-first century and it is my hypothesis that it can be taken as a representative of today's society's gender perception. The selection of one British and two American novels is based on the premise that Britain and the USA share a similar cultural background and gender ideology.

In the following section, a working definition for the tomboy term will be developed as well as a tomboy analysis grid which is based on five studies, dating from 1977 to 2013. Furthermore, four hypotheses about literary tomboys will be formulated. Sections 3 to 5 investigate the three novels, firstly by analysing them according to the contemporary analysis grid and hypotheses,

developed in section 2; and secondly by observing the tomboy characters within their historical backgrounds. The last section will summarize this thesis' findings.

## 2. Definition of tomboy

In order to consider and analyse different aspects in literary tomboy characters, we need to establish a definition of that term. This is not a straight forward undertaking, as the concept of the tomboy is not clearly defined. A short definition, given by the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, is: “a girl who behaves in a manner usually considered boyish” (2015). Another contemporary definition by Oxford Dictionaries says that a tomboy is “[a] girl who enjoys rough, noisy activities traditionally associated with boys“ (2015). Those two brief definitions might give a first impression of the perception of tomboys and their behaviour today. Nevertheless, a more precise and comprehensive definition is needed to investigate literary characters and their tomboyish behaviour.

In attempting to find a working definition of the tomboy-concept, it also has to be considered that people’s mind-sets and society’s expectations of gender performance change continuously. As society develops, the perception of tomboys changes and with it the degree of acceptance and reactions towards them. By investigating five studies on tomboys, covering 36 years from the oldest study published in 1977 to the most recent one published in 2013, it is attempted to show this development. Nevertheless, from the publication of the first book *Little Women* to the publication of the first study, almost 100 years remain in which no research on tomboys can be found. This problem shall be met with two counter-measures: firstly, a contemporary lens shall be employed to analyse all three books. Secondly, the gender roles during the times the books were published shall be investigated and how they have changed from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century.

According to etymology dictionaries, the term ‘tomboy’ with the common meaning it still has today is first mentioned in the sixteenth century. It can be found in both British and American English language usage. In *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* its development is described under the term ‘tom’ as “† [obsolete] bold boy or woman; wild romping girl XVI” (Hoad 929). Hence, in the early sixteenth century tomboy was an expression used to describe men and women alike but changed its meaning within the sixteenth century towards a sole description of females. *The Barnhart Dictionary of*

*Etymology*, published in the US, also describes the term under the hypernym 'tom': "Before 1553, rude, boisterous boy; formed from English *Tom* + *boy*. In 1579 the word was applied to a bold or immodest woman (a use that became obsolete before 1700). By 1592, in Lyly's *Midas* the word is recorded in the sense of a girl who behaves like a spirited, boisterous boy" (Barnhart 1148). A change of the term tomboy from being a negative label to becoming a more positive identifier can be observed, indicated by the adjective 'spirited'. Compared to the modern definitions above which use hedging wordings like "usually considered boyish" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary 2015) and "traditionally associated with boys" (Oxford Dictionaries 2015) tomboy definitions from the sixteenth century are unvarnished gendered descriptions. The US American *Online Etymology Dictionary* offers a synonym for tomboy: "tomrig 'rude, wild girl'" (Online Etymology). However, this second term is neither as widely known nor used as tomboy.

What is regarded as femininity constantly undergoes various changes of perception due to the changes of the perception of gender-roles and gender-conventions. The ancient Greek philosopher Agrippa "declared that woman and man differed only in their generative function, and that they had been created with an equal capacity for reason" (Shephard, 111); a conception that had no need for a term like tomboy. Up to the sixteenth century, "there was not a consensus on the correct role of women within society" (Shephard, 21); "The Knox debate provides evidence that misogynistic attitudes towards women were not uniformly held, and that attitudes were far more complex and sophisticated than has hitherto been realized" (Shephard, 9). However, within the sixteenth century, the approach to gender and gender-typical behaviour changed. In 1557, Erasmus "presented a stereotype image of good women as obedient, meek, silent, modest and careful as housewives, and bad women as loud, demanding and shrewish" (Shephard, 109). Also "[t]he more influential early humanists shared the view that a woman's function was essentially private in nature" (Shephard, 113). A culturally designed image of 'the woman' was born. This clearly defined border between typical male and female characteristics required the usage of terms like tomboy or tomrig that signalled gender-transgressions and untypical behaviour.

## **2.1. The changing meaning of the tomboy term as illustrated by academic studies**

In the following, the main findings of five studies on tomboys will be presented. A change of the notion of tomboy from being abnormal behaviour towards a more favourable perception can be observed. The studies will show the absence of biological malfunction and a tomboy's beneficial potential. They will moreover provide comparisons with siblings and between generations.

In this paper's first study about tomboys by Hyde, Rosenberg and Behrman from 1977, the main focus is to argue "that tomboyism is statistically quite common and there is little indication that it is abnormal" (Hyde, Rosenberg and Behrman 73). They are one of the first to investigate tomboyism without considering it as an antecedent of homosexuality, transsexuality or 'gender confusion'. Other studies at that time work with the premise that tomboyism is a disorder. Therefore, the study's starting point is the working definition that "a tomboy is a girl who says she is a tomboy" (Hyde, Rosenberg and Behrman 75). In their sample of young women from seventh to ninth grade, 63 percent claim to be tomboys or that they had been tomboys. Another sample of adult women reveals a similarly high number, with 51 percent stating that they had been tomboys (Hyde, Rosenberg and Behrman 74). These women's self-characterizations indicate that, firstly, the term is not as negatively connoted as previous studies suggested and secondly, that a high number of women regard or regarded themselves as tomboys.

The study offers three findings on the characteristics of a tomboy. Firstly, the development of six categories that are viewed as tomboyish behaviour. These categories are a preference for sports, active games and being outdoors, enjoying boys' games, enjoying boys' and girl's games equally, wearing jeans, preferring boys as playmates, and the strongest indication: preferring to be a boy (Hyde, Rosenberg and Behrman 74-5). A second finding is that the family's background has only a small impact on the development of tomboyish behaviour: "Tomboys did not differ from nontomboys on mother's employment status or father's education. However, tomboys were more frequent when mothers were more educated" (Hyde, Rosenberg and Behrman 74). And thirdly and most importantly, they recognized "tomboyism as a normal, active part of

female development” (Hyde, Rosenberg and Behrman 75) instead of categorizing it as abnormal, unhealthy behaviour.

Another study which was conducted about seven years later, in 1984, aims to prove that tomboyism means a girl’s inclusion of male-stereotypical interests and activities rather than the exclusion of female-stereotypical ones. According to Plumb and Cowan, tomboys “choose both traditionally male and female activities equally” (710). They also found that “self-described tomboys do not substitute boys’ activities for girls’ activities. Instead, they appear to expand their repertoire of activities to include both gender-traditional and non-traditional activities” (Plumb and Cowan 710-11). Another finding shows that typical male activities are considered more gender neutral than traditional female activities which are more stereotyped. Therefore, girls who prefer activities traditionally considered male are not as easily condemned as boys who prefer girls’ activities. This might be a reason for the rapid positive development of the tomboy reputation.

Plumb and Cowan’s study works with the notion of gender-flexibility and, like the study from 1977, shows that tomboyism is a normal development of coming to maturity. Out of all women questioned, 51% self-identified themselves as tomboys in their childhoods. In this study, tomboyism is regarded as a phenomenon that widens a girl’s behavioural possibilities, softens gender-fixed roles and is beneficial. Definitions by previous studies claimed that tomboys dislike girls’ games and female companions while preferring male playmates and activities. These assumptions were questioned within the current study and proved not to be true since tomboys like both genders as playmates; the preference of sports, the outdoors and practical clothing; as well as a preference of career before motherhood.

Tomboyism as an advantage to a girl’s development and social behaviour is the outcome of a study by Betsy Levonian Morgan from 1998 as well. She states that “tomboyism reflects many of the important situational and dispositional interactions inherent to any complex social behavior and it deserves attention as a distinctive subset of gender-related behavior” (Morgan 799). In her study, Morgan investigates the notion of the tomboy throughout three generations of women being born between 1902 and 1979. The main outcome was that being

a tomboy consistently means doing 'boys' stuff'. Nevertheless, she found that the perception of tomboys is slightly changing and that socialization has an impact on this perception.

There is a small difference in the amount of women per generation who considered themselves as being tomboys in their childhoods. Being a tomboy becomes more desirable the later a woman is born: "[s]eniors were less likely to report being tomboys than were the two younger cohorts" (Morgan 794). The number of women who self-identify as tomboys increases from older generations with 46% to younger generations with 77% (Morgan 793). Reasons for this might be "major changes in the social sanctions against gender inappropriate behavior" (Morgan 797). "However, the senior citizen sample may have seen this label as more socially undesirable" (Morgan 798).

The younger the generation, the more women tend to regard themselves as tomboys. This development is paralleled by literature, where tomboy characters become more common and daring. For example, Georgina, alias George, in *Five on a Treasure Island* published in 1942, behaves much more boyishly than her antecedent Josephine, alias Jo, in *Little Women* from 1868. According to the growing number of women who state that they once were or still are tomboys, we might say that tomboys also have started to be more accepted: "several respondents reported that they had 'never' stopped being tomboys" (Morgan 794). It appears to become more desirable and normal to behave tomboyishly and that the term is no longer equated with being an outcast any more. This study suggests that a slight softening of the boundaries between gender-roles is happening. The perception of appropriate and gender conforming behaviours seems to blur.

According to Morgan, "the definition of tomboy behaviour appears to be 'doing boy stuff' but not necessarily rejecting 'girl stuff'" (Morgan 797). Her study's outcome shows that behaviour that is regarded as being typically tomboyish includes: first, "mannerism [which] was created to reflect wearing boys' apparel, rejecting girls' apparel and 'acting' like a boy;" second, "Sports [...] football, base ball and fishing;" third, "Rough and Tumble play [...] climbing trees, getting dirty and playing war games;" fourth, "Boy toys;" fifth, "Companions;" and sixth, "Role-playing as males" (Morgan 796). The two top categories of typical tomboy

behaviour throughout all three generations are “Sports” and “Rough and Tumble play” (Morgan 796). According to her study, the average age of ending the tomboy period is 12.59 years (Morgan 793). This will be interesting later as two of our three tomboy characters are older than that but still considered as tomboys.

Morgan found that definitions of what constitutes tomboy behaviour “changed very little” (Morgan 798). However, the reasons for the classification of certain behaviour as tomboyish may have changed or might be changing as socialization and society’s development influence the perception of tomboys (Morgan 798): “[t]he most intriguing finding from this study is the enduring perception that certain sets of behaviors (e.g., outdoor play or team sports) are ‘boy stuff.’ It remains to be seen whether the current generation of girls will be as likely to label their everyday behavior as ‘tomboy’ behavior” (Morgan 797). If we take the parallels to literary characters into account, sets of behaviour and their association with gender have already changed. The female protagonist Katniss in *The Hunger Games* is a hunter, a good fighter and a provider for her family. However, none of the other characters regards her talents as boyish; she is rather seen as a strong and gender-neutral competitor in a fight between both male and female rivals.

In a study from 2002 by Bailey, Bechtold and Berenbaum, a comparison was made between tomboys and their male as well as female siblings. The research reveals three new outcomes. First, tomboys behave more similar to their brothers than their sisters and, in general, they behave in a more masculine way. Second, their association with boys in midst-childhood might cause sex-atypical behaviour and could even delay the start of dating in puberty. And third, as suggested in the study by Hyde, Rosenberg and Behrman from 1977, tomboys’ domestic environments do not seem to influence or increase tomboyish behaviour (Bailey et al. 340). Especially this last point will be of interest when we regard the living conditions of our literary tomboys. Jo and Katniss experienced atypical domestic environments when growing up due to the losses of their fathers. George’s father stays with the family but is emotionally absent and distanced. Contradicting both studies, literature

suggests that living conditions may be a reason for a development of tomboyish behaviour.

The study also confirms that the notion of being a tomboy is no longer a negative one. Parents were asked to let their daughters participate in the study if they thought of them as being tomboys. It can be assumed that they would not have encouraged their children to do so if they had thought identifying them as tomboys could negatively impact their lives. Few parents would have defined their daughters as tomboys if the term had still been seen as something abnormal.

Although people have a common mental image of tomboys as “a young girl, possibly with short hair and a baseball cap, who likes sports, plays with boys, and has little use for dolls and dresses” (Bailey, Bechtold and Berenbaum 333), this current study showed that the degree to which a girl’s behaviour is regarded as tomboyish varies a lot. As parents were asked to let their tomboy children be part of the study, those parents deliberately defined their daughters as tomboys. The data revealed a wide behavioural variance amongst those parentally selected tomboys. Some girls that were defined as tomboys by their parents answered more similar to other tomboys’ sisters who were not defined as tomboys or even less male-stereotypically than even those non-tomboy sisters (Bailey, Bechtold and Berenbaum 339).

In general, tomboys, in comparison to their brothers and sisters, are more similar to their brothers’ behaviour and interests. They sometimes go as far as expressing that they would rather be boys than girls (Bailey, Bechtold and Berenbaum 339). Following male traits in regard to interests and activities and more masculine behaviour also means that “[t]omboys were slightly, but not significantly more aggressive than their sisters” (Bailey, Bechtold and Berenbaum 340). Their behaviour does not seem to develop in sex-atypical environments as siblings behave gender-typically. If it is influenced by hormones, those hormones do not cause any other, for example biological or physical changes. This also means that “tomboys were not less attractive than their sisters” (Bailey, Bechtold and Berenbaum 340). It is more likely that their strong connection with boys “may delay or prevent tomboys from learning some aspects of sex-typical behaviour from their peers. We might expect, for

example, that tomboys would begin dating later than other girls” (Bailey, Bechtold and Berenbaum 340). Tomboys’ rather atypical preference to associate with other-sex children in the midst of childhood might also be a reason for potentially atypical sexual behaviour in their later years (Bailey, Bechtold and Berenbaum 340).

Bailey, Bechtold and Berenbaum regard tomboys as an opportunity to explore “cognitive theories of gender development, including relations between gender cognitions and the development of sex-typed behaviour” (Bailey, Bechtold and Berenbaum 335). Tomboys’ gender-atypical behaviour challenges the general western perception of gender-typical behaviour, which enables investigating culturally developed concepts of gender. The categories which are used to identify tomboyish behaviour in their study are “Playmate preference;” “activities and interests” including “boys’ toys” as well as “masculine interests;” and “Gender identity” (Bailey, Bechtold and Berenbaum 338).

In a 2013 study by Ahlqvist, Halim, Greulich, Lurye and Ruble, the main conclusion is that tomboyism leads to greater gender-flexibility rather than the rejection of feminine aspects, which also includes a generally greater acceptance of atypical behaviours and less social marginalization. This outcome confirms Plumb and Cowan’s assumption from 1984, who already implied that tomboyism means inclusion, expansion, higher gender-flexibility and is a positive developmental step for women.

This study is the first of all we have considered so far that offers not just the two categories tomboy or non-tomboy but also so-called ‘in-betweens’ who define themselves neither as ‘typical’ girls nor complete tomboys. Due to this third category, the percentage of tomboys is much lower than in other studies. While in Morgan’s study 77 percent of women define themselves as tomboys at one point in their lives (Morgan 793), only 26 percent in this latest study subscribe to this classification (Ahlqvist et al. 570). A reason for this comparably low percentage may be the option to choose the neutral ‘in-between’ category, which was picked by 28 percent (Ahlqvist et al. 570). However, by regarding the in-between group at least partly as tomboyish and counting these two categories together, there are still only 54 percent of women who used to consider or still consider themselves as tomboys (Ahlqvist et al. 570). The

decreased percentage of tomboys in 2013 compared to older studies might either be caused by a changed definition of tomboyish behaviour or a changed perception of the concept. This development was already foreshadowed by Morgan's study from 1998: "It remains to be seen whether the current generation of girls will be as likely to label their everyday behavior as 'tomboy' behavior" (797). It might be considered as a signpost that the distinction between male and female characteristics is not as strong anymore. In the latter case, a woman who behaves boyishly would not consider herself as such but rather as daring and adventurous or might not even think of her behaviour as unusual at all.

The study assumes that an "interest in cross-gendered activities is a hallmark of tomboyism" (Ahlqvist et al. 572). Eight categories are used to define tomboyish-tendencies, which are presented in descending order: 1. "Gender-based interests & activities;" 2. "Sports;" 3. "Personal–social attributes" e.g. acting like a boy; 4. "Appearance;" 5. "Relationships" e.g. spending more time with boys; 6. "Color as a symbol for gender;" 7. "Preference for the male sex" e.g. that the girl would rather like to be a boy; and 8. "Flexibility" (Ahlqvist et al. 569 & 572). The estimated peak of tomboyism is at the age of about eight, ceasing with puberty at the age of approximately 12 (Ahlqvist et al. 572).

Ahlqvist, Halim, Greulich, Lurye and Ruble summarize three definitions of tomboyish behaviour in existing research and aim at finding out whether tomboys reject certain behaviours or embrace variety. In the first definition, tomboys reject female activities or behaviour; the second definition includes girls that prefer male activities and companions; and the third definition states that tomboys embrace "both masculine and feminine aspects of identity" (Ahlqvist et al. 565). In 1998, Morgan already implied that "the definition of tomboy behaviour appears to be 'doing boy stuff' not necessarily rejecting 'girl stuff'" (Morgan 797). Ahlqvist et al.'s study substantiates this implication. According to them, tomboys embrace male-stereotyped rather than rejecting female-related characteristics: "greater tomboyism was associated with lower interest in female-stereotyped activities [...] and greater interest in male-stereotyped activities" (Ahlqvist et al. 570) and "tomboyism was mostly characterized as expanding one's gender identity into the masculine domain,

rather than rejecting one's female identity" (Ahlqvist et al. 574). Gender-typical colour preference is the only category which shows a tendency towards a rejection of female symbolism (Ahlqvist et al. 573).

The study suggests that tomboys have a greater gender-flexibility and acceptance of variety: "tomboys were more likely to mention flexibility and gender-based interests and activities, confirming our prediction that tomboys might characterize their identity by gender flexibility" (Ahlqvist et al. 574). Gender-flexibility denotes equal interest in male and female stereotyped activities. Moreover, the intensity of tomboyish behaviour affects the degree of accepting gender-varied behaviour: "greater tomboyism was associated with greater acceptance of others' gender norm violations" (Ahlqvist et al. 575). This acceptance also includes stronger violations of traditional gender norms right up to homosexuality and transsexuality: "tomboyism was related to overall acceptance of gender transgressions, suggesting that they may believe in equal opportunities for exploration" (Ahlqvist et al. 576).

For tomboys, the feeling of being unlike other girls impedes the feeling of being an in-group member: "tomboyism was related to feeling less content about being a girl and feeling less typical than other girls" (Ahlqvist et al. 576). Due to this kind of self-perception, tomboys tend to show greater understanding and respect towards outcasts or do not perceive them as such (Ahlqvist et al. 577). Despite their outstanding status, tomboys do not suffer as much marginalization as other outsiders: "Although tomboys by definition are in some way gender-atypical, tomboyism is also viewed as somewhat normative and socially acceptable, which [...] might buffer girls from these risks" (Ahlqvist et al. 576).

In only 36 years from the first study from 1977 to this last one in 2013, the perception of tomboys changed from somebody whose normality needed to be proven and defended to someone "somewhat normative and socially acceptable" (Ahlqvist et al. 576). This rapid development is paralleled in literature, as we will see throughout the next sections.

## 2.2. Working Definition and Defining Characteristics

After this overview of five studies, we will now try to establish a working definition of a tomboy as well as summarize a collection of characteristics that are regarded as tomboyish. As the publication dates of the three chosen novels stretch over 140 years in which gender roles have changed considerably, a broad definition of tomboy is needed. Therefore, the assumption is that girls and women are tomboys when they behave in a way and show interest in things that are considered boyish or masculine by society of their time. This definition will allow to include generational fashions, which is necessary as gender-roles change permanently. In every generation, boyish or masculine interests mean something different. Katniss in *The Hunger Games*, for example, fights and hunts and competes as an equal against male competitors. In *The Hunger Games*, those skills are not regarded as typically masculine whereas they would have been solely male activities in *Little Women*. Therefore, the working definition has always to be seen within norms and conventions of the publication time. One hypothesis of this paper is that the working definition will be applicable to all three characters.

The assumption is that the defining characteristics of tomboys that have been identified in the aforementioned studies will be found in literary tomboys as well. Therefore the studies will be used to create an analytical framework. A summarizing grid of all tomboy characteristics mentioned will provide a good overview of what is said to constitute a tomboy. A second hypothesis is that at least four of the eight characteristics of a tomboy will be present in our tomboy protagonist characters' behaviours and preferences. Only two categories are shared by all researchers: preference of action, outdoors, sports; and interest in girls' as well as boys' games. All other characteristics are at least used in three studies.

	<b>Tomboy characteristics</b>	<b>1977</b>	<b>1984</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2013</b>
1	behaving like a boy/masculine/ sex atypical behaviour			(Morgan 796)	(Bailey et al. 340)	(Ahlqvist et al. 572)
2	apparel (including colour and practicality)	(Hyde et al. 74)	(Plumb & Cowan 710)	(Morgan 796)		(Ahlqvist et al. 572, 573)
3	gender identity (including wishing to be a boy)	(Hyde et al. 75)			(Bailey et al. 338, 339)	(Ahlqvist et al. 572)
4	preference of male playmates	(Hyde et al. 74)		(Morgan 796)	(Bailey et al. 338)	(Ahlqvist et al. 572)
5	interest in girls' and boys' games (inclusion)	(Hyde et al. 74)	(Plumb & Cowan 710)	(Morgan 796)	(Bailey et al. 338)	(Ahlqvist et al. 572)
6	preference of boys' games; doing boys stuff	(Hyde et al. 74)		(Morgan 796, 797)	(Bailey et al. 338)	(Ahlqvist et al. 572)
7	preference of action, outdoors and sports	(Hyde et al. 74)	(Plumb & Cowan 710)	(Morgan 796)	(Bailey et al. 338)	(Ahlqvist et al. 572)
8	gender flexibility (tolerance and acceptance)	(Hyde et al. 75)	(Plumb & Cowan 710)	(Morgan 796)		(Ahlqvist et al. 572)

Table I: Tomboy Characteristics – Analysis Grid

This thesis works under the premise that time has changed gender-conventions and the perception of male and female connoted characteristics. Like in the explanation of the working definition above, 'boys' stuff' means something completely different in the nineteenth than in the twenty-first century. Therefore, these typically tomboyish activities in the grid are phrased in a way that is to be regarded as neutral and temporal. They are universally applicable to different periods in history but can only be observed in relation to other female characters as well as the historical gender-roles and conventions. Only when these characteristics are seen in an historical context, can they be employed to preferences and behaviours of the nineteenth, the twentieth and – a dystopian version of – the twenty-first century. The degree to which behaviour is considered as boyish varies; e.g. tomboyish behaviour in the nineteenth century would not be considered as tomboyish in the twenty-first century.

In the analysis of the three novels, two other aspects will be taken into account: family background and the tomboy's perception of out-groups. That a girl's family background does not have significant influence on her development is stated in the study by Hyde, Rosenberg and Behrman (74) in 1977 and in the

study by Bailey, Bechtold and Berenbaum in 2002 (340). However, it has to be mentioned that the latter study finds that the mother's education slightly increases the degree of tomboyishness in the daughter. All protagonists lost their fathers either temporarily or permanently which will be discussed later in detail, a change in their lives that might have led to or have increased their tomboyish behaviour. Therefore, another hypothesis is that family background, especially the loss of the father, might influence a girl's behaviour and cause her to become a tomboy or increase tomboyish behaviour, at least in literature. The second aspect, which deals with the tomboy's acceptance and tolerance towards other outsiders, is addressed by Ahlqvist et al. (577.) This notion will not be regarded as a main characteristic of tomboyism as it is only mentioned in this single study. However, we will consider the degree of the tomboys' tolerance-levels towards other characters and gender-transgressions in general, as far as they occur. The supposition is that tomboys react more tolerantly and accepting towards out-group members.

Two assumptions about tomboys which were raised in the studies above will not be included in the analysis: firstly, the working definition by Hyde, Rosenberg and Behrman that "a tomboy is a girl who says she is a tomboy" (75). Self-identification will not be applied to this paper's book selection because not all of the characters explicitly refer to themselves as a tomboy. Secondly, the average age in which girls cease to be tomboys lies around twelve years, coinciding with the beginning of puberty (Morgan 793 and Ahlqvist et al. 572). Two of our three characters exceed this age. Katniss is sixteen and Jo is fifteen, only George is eleven and would fall into that age bracket. We will assume that Katniss and Jo belong into the category of tomboys who stay tomboyish throughout puberty and longer and are tomboyish to highlight them as unusual or more interesting characters. As the age of these two tomboys lies outside of the age-range for typical real-life tomboys, the age-question cannot serve as a hypothesis in this analysis.

To summarize, next to the framework of tomboy characteristics which will be looked for within the novels, the analytical framework has to be updated with four hypotheses. First, the working definition developed will be applicable to all three characters. Second, at least four of the eight characteristics will be part of

the tomboys' personalities. Third, family crises affect the development of tomboyish behaviour by reinforcing it. Fourth, tomboys' perception of outsiders is different from that of other characters, as they are outsiders themselves. Therefore, their acceptance towards out-group members is higher. These hypotheses are based on real-life studies of actual tomboys but will be used to analyse fictional characters in young adult novels. This thesis assumes that literature parallels real-life developments and that most of the real-life assumptions from the studies above will be mirrored in the literary tomboy characters.

### **3. *Little Women***

In the novel *Little Women* by the American author Louisa May Alcott, which was first published in 1868/1869, four sisters and their struggles in growing up are presented. *Little Women* consists of two parts and stretches over several years. The context of part one is that the four sisters are at home with their mother, while their father serves as a pastor at the frontline of the American Civil War (Sage 395). The family used to be rich but lost their money due to an unfortunate investment. The sisters struggle with their poverty but resolve to learn how to be as good and contented as their mother to honour their father and make him proud when he returns. At the beginning of part one, our tomboy character Jo is fifteen years old. Jo is the most outstanding character because she is different, and that difference is referred to by her as well as other characters. She is also the character who speaks the opening line of the novel's first chapter and her name commences chapters two and three. She remains a very strong and ubiquitous character throughout the first part.

In part two of the novel, the family is reunited with the father but loses either permanently or temporarily one daughter after the other to marriage, travelling, working away from home or death. The four 'little women' are grown women now. Meg struggles with her roles as wife and mother, Jo tries to be an author and independent, Beth slowly loses her health and dies after a severe illness, and Amy travels through Europe and wants to become an artist. At the end of part two, Amy and Jo are also happily married, having found their perfect ways to live, which differ immensely from what they imagined in part one. Jo is not as attention arresting and tomboyish in the second part as in the first. However, she does not completely bend to gender conventions, still behaves unconventionally and her happy ending comprises a blend of womanly and tomboyish characteristics.

## 3.1. Analysis

### 3.1.1. General Observations

Jo correlates with this paper's working definition of a tomboy and fulfils every single one of the eight characteristics of the analysis grid. Due to this, two out of the five hypotheses established earlier are met. In the following, quotes from the novel will substantiate this claim. Quotes that overlap with two or more characteristics from the analysis grid are either analysed in various categories or in the category that has the highest concordance. The three other sisters serve as a distinct contrast to Jo. They present three very womanly characters who conform to the gender conventions of their time. It will also be shown how other characters react to Jo's tomboyish behaviour. As Jo undergoes a significant character development throughout part one, the two parts will be approached separately in the analysis. It will become obvious through this divided analysis that the tomboy characteristics in Jo decrease with her becoming older and more experienced.

The first impression the reader gains of Jo is: "grumbled Jo, lying on the rug" (Alcott 3) in the novel's opening line. Short reactions of the other three sisters, introduced in the following lines, establish a sharp contrast to Jo's very unladylike behaviour: Meg sighs and looks at her dress; Amy is described as small and speaks her line "with an injured sniff" (Alcott 3); and Beth responds contentedly. While Jo grumbles and lies on the floor, Beth is hinted at as being the shy and devoted angel in the house, Meg a womanly beauty and Amy still a young child. In the beginning of the novel, the sisters' characteristics are introduced in an exaggerated manner. This one-sided character presentation at the beginning dissolves throughout the first half of part one and develops into a more complex characterization which also leads to offering a more diversified image of our tomboy Jo.

That Jo is a tomboy is not just suggested but becomes obvious in many instances. Firstly, through her sister's criticism of her boyish manners: "You are old enough to leave off boyish tricks, and to behave better, Josephine. It didn't matter so much when you were a little girl; but now you are so tall, and turn up your hair, you should remember that you are a young lady." (Alcott 5) Secondly,

through Jo's response to this statement and her passionate exclamation that she would rather be a boy:

'I'm not! [...] 'I hate to think I've got to grow up, and be Miss March, and wear long gowns, and look as prim as a China aster! It's bad enough to be a girl, anyway, when I like boys' games and work and manners! I can't get over my disappointment in not being a boy; and it's worse than ever now, for I'm dying to go and fight with papa, and I can only stay at home and knit, like a poky old woman!' (Alcott 5-6)

Jo expresses her dislike of wearing female clothing and appearance, being trapped in the private sphere and fulfilling womanly chores, as well as her desire to go and fight with her father or stay young and as such in a more flexible role than gender conventions force her into as a grown woman. To clarify her uncommon boyish character completely for the reader, she is even called a tomboy by her sister Beth: 'If Jo is a tomboy and Amy a goose, what am I, please?' (Alcott 6).

In descriptions of Jo, the omniscient narrator uses various male connotations, like in this explicit character description:

Fifteen-year-old Jo was very tall, thin, and brown, and reminded one of a colt; [...] She had a decided mouth, a comical nose, and sharp, gray eyes, which appeared to see everything, and were by turns fierce, funny, or thoughtful. Her long, thick hair was her one beauty; but it was usually bundled into a net, to be out of her way. Round shoulders had Jo, big hands and feet, a flyaway look to her clothes, and the uncomfortable appearance of a girl who was rapidly shooting up into a woman, and didn't like it. (Alcott 6-7)

Even through a contemporary lens, words like 'colt' and 'big hands and feet' would be more associated with men. The fact that Jo wants 'her one beauty [...] to be out of the way' might even strike modern women as a non-womanly characteristic as, generally speaking, women still emphasize their looks and beauty more than men. Attributes like 'brown,' 'decided,' 'sharp,' 'fierce,' and 'thoughtful,' will be discussed within the historical analysis of gender roles later. Of all four introductions of the March sisters, Jo's is the longest. As she is exceptional and cannot be categorized as one of the womanly archetypes, she needs a closer description. Her characterization provides more insight into her personality. In contrast to Jo's, Meg's description is only about her appearance.

When describing Jo's reactions, utterances and behaviour, the narrator's language is especially energetic and punchy. Examples are: "exclaimed impetuously" (Alcott 19), "prancing about" (Alcott 21) and "Jo would whistle and make a great racket getting ready" (Alcott 41). The chosen vocabulary stresses that Jo's character radiates with energy, activity and conspicuousness – which are characteristics that are not compatible with the image of the Victorian angel in the house. She also 'cries out' frequently and far more often than the other sisters. In the 257 pages of part one, Jo cries out forty times (Alcott 4, 5, 8, 10, 11, 18, 21, 26, 30, 31, 34 x2, 41, 43, 64, 71, 74, 85 x2, 90, 91, 108, 119 x2, 123, 125, 131, 135, 145, 170, 174, 194, 195, 205, 209, 224 x2, 229 x2, 234) which signals an impulsive, outgoing personality. Jo's internal development, her pursuit to be good and her success in becoming more patient are expressed by the decreasing amount of her 'crying out' in the second half of part one.

In Jo's presentation, the application of a masculine semantic field locates her within the male sphere. Her quite outgoing, manly behaviour is emphasized by the repeated use of 'march' as in: "marching up and down" (Alcott 8), "Jo shouldered her broom and marched into the house" (Alcott 55), "Jo was dismissed, but chose to march up and down the hall like a sentinel" (Alcott 231). 'Marching' is associated with soldiers, the army, demonstrations and determination as well as the public and male sphere. In the last phrase, Jo is even likened to a "sentinel". In a sample above, she was compared with a colt, a young male horse and in two other samples that will follow she is considered to be a "Sancho" and acts "in a gentlemanly manner." All examples use otherwise solely masculine connoted words to describe the tomboy Jo.

Several contrasts between Jo and her sisters highlight her position as a tomboy. Beth locates Jo outside the feminine sphere through the following statement: "Poor Jo! It's too bad, but it can't be helped; so you must try to be contented with making your name boyish, and playing brother to us girls,' said Beth" (Alcott 6). By Beth's reference 'to us girls,' she places Jo outside the group of 'us' to which the three other sisters belong. Jo remains an in-between, who does not belong "to us girls" but can only "play" a brother, not being male either. In another situation, contrasts between feminine and masculine characteristics of the sisters are established through their very different reactions towards an

official invitation: “So Meg went away to ‘accept with thanks,’ look over her dress, and sing blithely as she did up her one real lace frill; while Jo finished her story, her four apples, and had a game of romps with Scrabble [her pet rat].” (Alcott 30). While Meg is uttering her thanks, singing and thoroughly preparing her flawless appearance; Jo is completely absorbed in literature and romps around happily. Later, in society, Meg “looks so fresh and quiet, and dances like a lady” (Alcott 35) while Jo “stood about with her back carefully against the wall, and felt as much out of place as a colt in a flower garden” (Alcott 32). Here again we have Jo being referred to as a colt and especially in contrast to a flower garden, which heightens the perception of Jo being or looking masculine.

### 3.1.2. Analysis Grid

Jo fulfils the tomboyish characteristic of behaving boyishly and in a masculine way (Table I: Tomboy Characteristics – Analysis Grid). Her masculinity is immediately addressed at the beginning of the novel: “examining the heels of her shoes in a gentlemanly manner” (Alcott 4); and when Amy accuses Jo of acting in an unladylike manner, Jo instantly reacts by increasing her masculine behaviour: “Jo immediately sat up, put her hands in her pockets, and began to whistle. ‘Don’t, Jo; it’s so boyish!’ ‘That’s why I do it.’ ‘I detest rude, unladylike girls!’” (Alcott 5). Jo’s location within masculinity continues as she is the one who undertakes male work like carrying heavy objects: “Jo brought wood and set chairs, dropping, overturning, and clattering everything she touched” (Alcott 10). Here, her descriptions remind the reader of a gangling adolescent boy. In another situation she carries Beth “in her strong arms” (Alcott 240), an act that combines the male connoted characteristic of being strong with a feminine connoted characteristic of nurturing, a gender blending phenomenon that will be discussed later in more detail. Although women are regarded as being emotional and are allowed to show their feelings, Jo forbids herself to cry in front of her sisters: “Jo leaning on the back, where no one would see any sign of emotion if the letter should happen to be touching” (Alcott 12); and is not willing to express fear: “‘I’m not afraid of anything,’ returned Jo, with a toss of the head” (Alcott 59); two behavioural patterns that are coded as masculine.

Jo's language use, her relatively high level of aggression and the desire to support her family can also be considered more masculine than feminine. Two reactions towards Jo's way of expressing herself will reveal quite masculine behaviour: "Jo does use such slang words!" observed Amy, with a reproving look at the long figure stretched on the rug" (Alcott 5); and: "Don't use such dreadful expressions," said Meg [...] 'I like good strong words that mean something,' replied Jo, [...] 'Call yourself any names you like; but I am neither a rascal nor a wretch, and I don't choose to be called so'" (Alcott 43). A situation that shows Jo's high potential for aggression occurs after Amy almost died. Afterwards, Jo reflects about herself: "It seems as if I could do anything when I'm in a passion; I get so savage, I could hurt anyone, and enjoy it" (Alcott 90). However, not only Jo, but also Amy is described as more aggressive: "both had quick tempers and were apt to be violent when fairly roused" (Alcott 84). Jo's striving to financially support her family is another masculine trait: "and I *am* so happy, for in time I may be able to support myself and help the girls.' [...] for to be independent and earn the praise of those she loved were the dearest wishes of her heart" (Alcott 173). Instead of thinking about marriage and about supporting a husband and breadwinner, Jo dreams about a career of her own and autonomy. She even goes as far as cutting her hair to earn money (Alcott 179) which shows that to support her family financially and independently means more to her than her beauty. With short boyish hair, her chances to win a husband substantially decrease.

Apparel is another characteristic of the tomboy analysis grid that Jo displays, as she "never troubled herself much about dress" (Alcott 29). It is also proven by her willingness to cut her hair, her "one beauty," that she does not care as much about her appearance as other women. Although she is "feeling like a shorn sheep on a wintry day" (Alcott 186), she values her ability to support the distressed family more than her looks. Her consolation is that the short hair looks boyish and is more practical in handling: "the barber said I could soon have a curly crop, which will be boyish, becoming, and easy to keep in order" (Alcott 179). The reaction of Meg is soothing but also reveals Jo's tremendous sacrifice: "Your hair *is* becoming, and it looks very boyish and nice,' returned Meg, trying not to smile at the curly head, which looked comically small on her tall sister's shoulders" (Alcott 186). To prove to Laurie that she does not care

about her apparel, she deliberately wears a huge man's hat: "'Oh, Jo, you are not going to wear that awful hat? It's too absurd! You shall *not* make a guy of yourself,' [...] 'I don't mind being a guy if I'm comfortable.' With that Jo marched straight away, and the rest followed" (Alcott 137). All examples show that Jo's comfort and practicality very often overrule her desire to be pretty, a preference not considered womanly.

A third tomboy characteristic of the analysis grid is fulfilled by Jo's wish to be a boy and consequently her unusual gender identity. Her wish is exemplified in three different ways: by identifying herself as masculine, by performing male parts in plays, and by openly wishing to be male. Although she is female, Jo rather identifies with men and their social roles, as becomes obvious in these two examples: "'I'm the man of the family now papa is away'" (Alcott 7); and "'I don't mean to plague you, and will bear it like a man'" (Alcott 249). In the sister's theatrical performances, "[n]o gentlemen were admitted; so Jo played male parts to her heart's content, and took immense satisfaction in a pair of russet-leather boots" (Alcott 22). As she is not born a man she tries to satisfy her wish by playing male roles in their performances "to her heart's content." Jo not only wishes to be a boy herself as she laments to Laurie: "'If I was a boy, we'd run away together, and have a capital time; but as I'm a miserable girl, I must be proper, and stop at home'" (Alcott 234); but she would even prefer the other sisters to be boys: "'Oh, dear me! Why weren't we all boys? Then there wouldn't be any bother'" (Alcott 225). This suggests that Jo regards being male as superior to being female or as the gender that has more personal freedom and therefore, in Jo's opinion, more fun.

The fourth characteristic that stands out is Jo's preference for male playmates. "Jo, who didn't care much for girls or girlish gossip" (Alcott 32) prefers male over female playmates, with the exception of her sisters, who are familiar with her otherness. Her favouring the other sex is exemplified by her feeling of comfort when she first talks with Laurie. After spending an uncomfortable evening in society, where she does not know how to behave and where she feels she does not fit in, she can act naturally with him again: "Jo was her merry self again, because her dress was forgotten, and nobody lifted their eyebrows at her" (Alcott 35). Jo and Laurie become close friends and confidantes. Laurie treats

Jo more as a fellow lad than a girl. A great physical and emotional intimacy develops between them: “as they both laughed, and ate out of one plate” (Alcott 142). It takes years till this intimacy becomes sensual for Laurie, but will never develop into this direction for Jo. In one scene, Jo hugs Laurie impulsively as a friend but Laurie kisses Jo back as a lover (Alcott 205-206). Other than her sisters, Jo has no female playmates. It can be argued that she prefers male playmates and dislikes playing with girls in general; her siblings are the only exception as they grew up with her.

Far into adulthood, Jo regards men in a purely unromantic manner, as playmates and interesting colleagues. Both her surviving sisters marry at a far younger age than Jo, but she deeply dislikes the idea of marriage: “‘You’ll feel better about it when somebody comes to take you away.’ ‘I’d like to see anyone try it,’ cried Jo fiercely” (Alcott 170). Jo’s unusually late development of romantic feelings brings us back to the studies that were considered in section 2.1. This phenomenon parallels the finding of Bailey, Bechtold and Berenbaum’s already presented: “We might expect, for example, that tomboys would begin dating later than other girls” (340). Although it was not a hypothesis of this thesis that tomboys start dating later, it needs to be included in the four hypotheses already mentioned. Therefore, the analysis frame now also contains this newly established hypothesis.

Jo does ‘girl’s stuff’ like knitting, sewing and cooking, although with less perfection than her sisters, as indicated several times. She is also highly interested in activities that are considered as doing ‘boys’ stuff’ by her and her family. Examples for these are presented by the following quotes: “‘Can’t keep still all day, and not being a pussycat I don’t like to doze by the fire. I like adventures, and I’m going to find some’” (Alcott 53); “The idea amused Jo, who liked to do daring things, and was always scandalizing Meg by her queer performances” (Alcott 54); and “one of the boy’s books in which Jo delighted” (Alcott 152). Jo “like[s] adventures,” “daring things,” “scandaliz[es]” her sisters, delivers “queer performances” and likes “boy’s books,” all activities considered boyish. Due to the fact that she is doing both, girl’s and boy’s stuff, she is fulfilling two additional categories of the analysis grid.

A seventh defining criterion of being a tomboy is a preference for action, outdoors and sports, which Jo displays. She swings herself out of the window instead of using the door: “going to the back entry window, [she] got out upon the roof of a low porch, swung herself down to the grassy bank, and took a roundabout way to the road.” (Alcott 165); Jo would like to learn how to fence from Laurie: “[Laurie:] ‘I was taking a lesson in fencing.’ [Jo:] ‘I’m glad of that.’ [Laurie:] ‘Why?’ [Jo:] ‘You can teach me’” (Alcott 166); she cannot resist a race with Laurie, not caring about her appearance at all: “‘Race down this hill with me, and you’ll be all right,’ suggested Laurie. No one was in sight; the smooth road sloped invitingly before her; and finding temptation irresistible, Jo darted away, soon leaving hat and comb behind her, and scattering hairpins as she ran” (Alcott 170); and she enjoys being chased: “Laurie chasing Jo all over the garden” (Alcott 171).

The last missing category of the analysis grid is gender flexibility. It is clear by now that Jo has a highly flexible relation to gender norms and roles and transgresses them on a daily basis. However, it is more difficult to exemplify her tolerance and acceptance towards other’s gender transgressions through explicit quotes, as few other characters strain against their gender roles. The only character who explicitly does so will be mentioned in the analysis of part two.

### **3.1.3. Working Hypotheses**

At this point of the analysis of *Little Women*, we have found examples for all eight tomboy characteristics from the analysis grid (Table I: Tomboy Characteristics – Analysis Grid) and we confirmed that our working definition for tomboys can be applied to Jo. Due to convincing material in the studies mentioned above and *Little Women*, we could also establish a fifth hypothesis for tomboys: that they are interested in romantic relations later than non-tomboy characters. In the following, the two other hypotheses that were established in section 2 will be discussed: out-group perception and the influence of family background and domestic crises. Subsequently, reactions of other characters to Jo and the development of her character will also be discussed.

Jo's out-group perception seems to be comparably low. However, four examples will present her as being tolerant and accepting of others. In the first two examples, Jo does not judge or act in a prejudiced manner against people because they are rich. She shows a significant amount of tolerance and insight into rich people's minds. Firstly, she expresses empathy towards her aunt who, although rich, seems to struggle with life, too: "I don't envy her much, in spite of her money, for after all rich people have about as many worries as poor ones, I think" (Alcott 49). Jo is also the one to discover what Laurie is missing in life and who he is before even knowing him: "I mean to know him someday; for he needs fun, I'm sure he does" (Alcott 27). She is empathic towards him and does not feel negatively affected by the fact that Laurie is rich. Jo assumes that rich people need friends and company as much as poor people do.

Two additional scenes reveal Jo's general tolerance towards others. She is the one who mends the rift between the March family and their aunt: "to everyone's surprise, [Jo] got on remarkably well with her irascible relative [...] for in her heart she rather liked the peppery old lady" (Alcott 44). It seems that Jo, more than the other family members, is able to overlook rude or "irascible" behaviour and successfully handles her aunt, who appears difficult to deal with. In another situation, she reviews what Laurie thinks about Kate: "Jo understood why Laurie 'primmed up his mouth' when speaking of Kate, for that young lady had a stand-off-don't-touch-me air" (Alcott 138). Her description of Kate does not seem like a judgement, it rather appears like an observation. Jo seems not to condemn any character because of his or her behaviour; the only negative property she ascribes to others is being boring. She rather feels that she herself is a queer outsider and does not exclude others.

Based on the assumption just established that Jo's tolerance of out-groups is higher than usual, it might be argued that also her view of in-groups and their prescribed rules is less critical. That would explain why she does not care about conventions or public opinion as much as her sisters. She is ignoring society's norms of dressing: "then I'll go without [gloves]. I don't care what people say!" (Alcott 30); as well as others' opinions about her: "'He'll laugh,' said Amy warningly. 'Who cares?' said Jo" (Alcott 156). Due to Jo's disregard of proper behaviour, she reacts more flexibly. This flexibility seems to offer her more

freedom, ease and fun than other characters. The following quote can substantiate this observation as it presents contrasting reactions of the sisters: “Jo laughed, Meg scolded, Beth implored, and Amy wailed” (Alcott 41). It seems that Jo enjoys life more than her sisters as she is laughing and genuinely cheerful most of the time. Even in serious situations, Jo “could not, for the life of her, help getting a morsel of fun” (Alcott 52).

The working hypothesis ‘that family background, especially the loss of the father, might influence a girl’s behaviour and cause her to become a tomboy or increase tomboyish behaviour’ (see above) does not apply to Jo. She was a tomboy before her father left. Although her masculine behaviour increases and she identifies herself as the man of the family at first; and although she wants to financially provide for her family through most of the novel, she simultaneously wants to be good, which in her case means patient, decent and womanly, and improve her character to make her father proud once he returns: “I’ll try and be what he loves to call me, a ‘little woman,’ and not be rough and wild” (Alcott 13). However, it might be argued that the liberal and loving parenting Jo receives provides her with sufficient freedom to discover her own character rather than trying to agree with conventions. It is never her mother who criticises Jo’s behaviour; the criticism she receives comes from her sisters or other members of society. Her mother encourages her to find her own individual way of living and simultaneously serves as a role model.

Other characters’ reactions to Jo increase in positivity the better they know her, for “there was so much good will in Jo, it was impossible not to take her blunt speeches as kindly as they were meant” (Alcott 58). A good example that presents the general confusion Jo usually elicits at the beginning of making her acquaintance is Kate’s reaction to her:

Kate looked rather amazed at Jo’s proceedings, especially as she exclaimed ‘Christopher Columbus!’ when she lost her oar; and Laurie said, ‘My dear fellow, did I hurt you?’ when he tripped over her feet in taking his place. But after putting up her glass to examine the queer girl several times, Miss Kate decided that she was ‘odd, but rather clever,’ and smiled upon her from afar. (Alcott 138)

It can be observed that although people find her different, “queer” and “odd” at first, Jo convinces them of her good character once they get to know her better.

Her sisters are an exception to this disposition. Especially Meg and Amy criticise her boyish behaviour and impulsive ways intensively: “You have been running, Jo; how could you? When *will* you stop such romping ways?’ said Meg reprovingly [...] [Jo:] ‘Never till I’m stiff and old, and have to use a crutch’” (Alcott 170); and “Meg, as she sat sewing at her window, was scandalized by the sight of Laurie chasing Jo all over the garden [...] ‘What shall we do with that girl? She never *will* behave like a young lady,’ sighed Meg, as she watched the race with a disapproving face” (Alcott 171). Beth, on the other hand, forms, leads and influences Jo in an indirect way towards more patience and composure. Unlike their tomboy sister, the other girls value conventions and rules of conduct. They furthermore believe that the adoption of those rules brings happiness and fortune. They also know Jo as someone who often does not know how to behave. It seems that they want to help Jo with their criticism and enable her to get a chance at happiness.

Laurie meets Jo with curiosity, sympathy and “much admiration” (Alcott 59), “looking as if he thought the name [Jo] suited her” (Alcott 34). He is not taken aback by her boyish behaviour. Quite to the contrary, he seems to enjoy her refreshing attitude: “Jo’s gentlemanly demeanor amused and set him at his ease” (Alcott 35); and he is not disturbed by her hearty language: “I see you pegging away at your books – no, I mean studying hard’; and Jo blushed at the dreadful ‘pegging’ which had escaped her. Laurie smiled, but didn’t seem shocked” (Alcott 35). Jo is also genuinely capable of lifting Laurie’s spirits: “showing a face which lost its listless look in a minute, as the big eyes brightened and the mouth began to smile” (Alcott 55).

A positive or negative attitude towards Jo has nothing to do with the other person’s age, as her aunt and Laurie’s grandfather both enjoy her company. Grandfather “liked Jo, for her odd, blunt ways suited him; and she seemed to understand the boy [Laurie] almost as well as if she had been one herself” (Alcott 62). He also approves of her and her opinions: “that answer pleased the old gentleman; he gave a short laugh, shook hands with her [...] saying, with a nod, ‘You’ve got your grandfather’s spirit’” (Alcott 61). In both examples, he compares Jo with men: in the first with a boy and in the second with her grandfather. It seems not to disturb him at all that Jo is a very boyish girl, quite

the opposite, he enjoys her conduct. Although impulsive himself, he even good-naturedly tolerates that “Jo browsed over the new library voraciously, and convulsed the old gentleman with her criticisms” (Alcott 67). Her aunt “wouldn’t speak to [the March family] for a time, but happening to meet Jo at a friend’s, something in her comical face and blunt manners struck the old lady’s fancy, and she proposed to take her for a companion” (Alcott 44). Both characters seem to value strong and forthright personalities who are able to or try to stand up to them. Jo is definitely such a character.

The greatest amount of negative feedback Jo receives is from acquaintances who meet her seldom or only know her superficially. As Jo does not care about spending time in society, she is inexperienced and sometimes careless in behaving appropriately and adequately. Therefore, the reactions of society regarding Jo are more restrained than towards her sisters. Nevertheless, it seems that characters who dislike Jo do not condemn her boyish or masculine behaviour but rather her blunt and impulsive manners. Her sisters remain the only characters in the novel that explicitly criticise Jo’s tomboyish behaviour.

While Jo delights everyone that seeks to analyse the tomboy in *Little Women* because she is ubiquitously tomboyish at first, her character soon reveals a higher degree of complexity by also showing feminine characteristics. Jo enjoys nursing and nurturing others and does it several times either in a physically or emotionally soothing way: “softly rubbing the poor ankle as she spoke” (Alcott 37); and “Jo bound up her foot with arnica, and brushed her hair” (Alcott 39). Although Meg is presented as very womanly, she has to admit that “she did not like nursing, and Jo did” (Alcott 196), which means that, in this respect, Jo is more womanly than Meg. Jo is also good at cleaning and housework: “as she laughed and talked, Jo had whisked things into place, and given quite a different air to the room” (Alcott 56).

Throughout the novel Jo’s character becomes less tomboyish and more feminine. Alongside the feminine characteristics which appear, Jo’s tomboyish behaviour decreases slightly. This happens because of her personal quest to become ‘better’. In the novel, becoming better means to become more patient, cheerful and decent whatever hardship life confronts you with; it does not necessarily mean to become more womanly or less tomboyish. However, Jo’s

trying to control herself better affects the degree of being tomboyish by lowering it.

Due to Jo's resolution to improve her character, her personality undergoes a remarkable development. From page 90 onwards, when she experiences a life-changing revelation, she is seriously interested in taming her temper. The first to notice her efforts is her mother, who praises her achievement. Jo is quite touched by the motherly feedback and "[l]aying her head on her arms, Jo wet her little romance with a few happy tears, for she *had* thought that no one saw and appreciated her efforts to be good" (Alcott 135). In another situation, Jo's temper is seriously challenged and she receives praise from her sister Meg for staying calm: "It was dreadfully provoking, but you kept your temper, and I'm so glad, Jo.' 'Don't praise me, Meg, for I could box his ears this minute. I should certainly have boiled over if I hadn't stayed among the nettles till I got my rage under enough to hold my tongue'" (Alcott 140). At the end of part two, the father describes how much Jo has changed: "In spite of the curly crop, I don't see the 'son Jo' whom I left a year ago,' said Mr. March. 'I see a young lady who pins her collar straight, laces her boots neatly, and neither whistles, talks slang, nor lies on the rug as she used to do [...] she doesn't bounce, but moves quietly [...] I rather miss my wild girl; but if I get a strong, helpful, tender-hearted woman in her place, I shall feel quite satisfied'" (Alcott 246). His observation perfectly exemplifies how closely being good is connected with behaving like a "young lady," while simultaneously he is not judging but "rather miss[ing]" the tomboy. Fortunately, Jo still possesses tomboyish characteristics; they are just not as overwhelming as at the novel's beginning and nicely joined by feminine characteristics.

#### **3.1.4. Part Two**

Jo's personality has even changed more between the ending of part one and the beginning of part two: "Jo's angles are much softened; she has learned to carry herself with ease, if not grace. The curly crop has lengthened [...] and only gentle words fall from her sharp tongue today" (Alcott 277). Instead of the forty times she 'cries out' in part one, we only observe her crying out fourteen times (Alcott 271, 282, 293, 302, 319, 343, 407, 415, 491, 496, 500, 524, 529, 546)

and only if in utter despair or under intolerable pressure. Jo is a grown woman now, much more mature and moderate. However, this does not mean that she completely stops behaving like a tomboy. It is still easily possible to identify all eight defining criteria of the analysis grid (Table I: Tomboy Characteristics – Analysis Grid) within the second part; and she fulfils every hypothesis about tomboys except for the one suggesting that family background increases tomboyish behaviour. As Jo has more contact to the outside world than in part one, she receives more feedback from society and is influenced more by non-related characters.

Following the same analysis order as in part one, the first characteristic from the grid that will be considered is masculine behaviour. As established before, Jo is much more womanly now, but still shows tendencies towards boyish manners: “Then she drew her hand over her eyes – for one of her boyish habits was never to know where her handkerchief was” (Alcott 499); and a dislike of feminine conduct: “Jo felt quite in her element, and found it very difficult to refrain from imitating the gentlemanly attitudes, phrases, and feats, which seemed more natural to her than the decorums prescribed for young ladies” (Alcott 240). Jo also meets the second defining criterion as she still chooses practicality and comfort over appearance: “Jo was in her element that day, and rushed about, with her gown pinned up, her hat anywhere but on her head, and her baby tucked under her arm” (Alcott 542). In both examples, Jo is in ‘her element’ while being in a very masculine environment or when being practical rather than beautiful. This suggests that there is still much of a tomboy in her.

Gender identity, the third criterion of the grid proves to be more complex to define in part two. Jo refers to herself both as woman and man. On the one hand, when she thinks about writing a book to achieve something great and become independent, “Jo felt herself a woman of means” (Alcott 265). On the other hand, she tells her mother: “if anything is amiss at home, I’m your man” (Alcott 359). These two quotes mirror Jo’s personality perfectly, which has developed into a blend of woman and tomboy, showing both feminine and masculine characteristics. At the end of the novel, Alcott writes: “freedom being the sauce best loved by the boyish soul” (Alcott 543). This statement includes men as well as women as she makes it about the soul rather than the body,

thereby including Jo, who has definitely got a 'boyish soul.' It might be taken as an explanation for Jo's tomboyish, very unusual and freedom-loving behaviour. If that was intended by Alcott, it seems exceptionally modern and gender-neutral.

The next three categories to be investigated are Jo's preference of male playmates, doing 'boys' stuff' and doing 'boys' and girls' stuff.' Firstly, the fact that "she had never outgrown her liking for lads" (Alcott 297) shows that Jo still enjoys male company of all ages, and her idea of opening a school for boys shows that she feels especially connected to the 'boyish soul.' "Jo never would act like other girls" (Alcott 473), which means that she is still doing 'boys' stuff.' Amy's thoughts about what Jo would do on an ocean steamer also exemplify how much Jo enjoys doing 'boys' stuff': "she would have gone up and sat on the main-top jib [...] [and] made friends with the engineers [...] she'd have been in such a state of rapture" (Alcott 347). However, Jo grows to be a wife and mother; therefore she needs to do more of what might be considered 'girls' stuff.' A statement of Jo combines both these tomboyish characteristics beautifully: "I've always longed for lots of boys, and never had enough; [...] a wilderness of boys to enjoy it with me!" (Alcott 537).

The last two categories of tomboyish behaviour are firstly, a preference of outdoors, sports and action and secondly, gender flexibility. As is suitable for the first defining criterion, Jo "persisted in feeling an interest in manly sports despite her nineteen years" (Alcott 272); and even at the end of the novel is still "ready for any lively adventure which might turn up" (Alcott 542). Jo is still transgressing the boundaries of her gender role, even if not as thoroughly as before. She becomes a hybrid of femininity and masculinity, embracing characteristics and activities of both gender roles. Jo's gender flexibility can also be observed in the way she regards Bhaer's unusual behaviour. He is the second unconventional character of the novel. By mending his own clothes, he undertakes typically feminine chores. Also his highly caring character, which is revealed in his nurturing attitude towards his two nephews, "the dearly beloved boys, for whom he makes a slave of himself" (Alcott 379) and the little girl Tina, could be considered a rather feminine characteristic. Jo does not condemn him for his aberrant behaviour. Quite the opposite, she is fascinated by his

unconventionality, free spirit and willingness to do whatever is necessary even if this means to mend his own clothes.

As stated before, four of the five hypotheses about tomboys prove to be true for Jo in part two. The working definition still applies to her, just not as overwhelmingly as in part one, and she meets all characteristics from the analysis grid. Like in part one, the hypothesis that family background influences tomboyish behaviour and that crisis increases tomboyishness proves not to be valid. Beth's long illness and early death make Jo more domestic, patient, nurturing and soft: "Precious and helpful hours for Jo, for now her heart received the teaching that it needed: lessons in patience [...]; charity for all, [...] the loyalty to duty that makes the hardest way easy, and the sincere faith that fears nothing, but trusts undoubtingly" (Alcott 461). Quite on the opposite, this family crisis seems to decrease tomboyish characteristics within Jo. The fourth hypothesis, which suggests that tomboys' acceptance of out-groups is higher seems to be true for Jo as well. She says about herself: "I am always interested in odd people" (Alcott 378). Her compassion for young boys who have no one that believes in them exemplifies this, too: "'I've been through something of it, and I know all about it. I've a special interest in such young bears, and like to show them that I see the warm, honest, well-meaning boys' hearts, in spite of the clumsy arms and legs and the topsy-turvy heads'" (Alcott 538). Moreover, Jo sees Bhaer as the gentle, kind and generous man that he is instead of the deviant, poor professor. This shows her as having an including rather than excluding personality. The last hypothesis, which was established because of Jo's dislike of love and marriage, also applies to Jo in the second part. Tomboys seem to be interested in dating, marriage and intimate relationships later than their non-tomboy peers. "Jo hated 'philandering,' and wouldn't allow it, always having a joke or a smile ready at the least sign of impeding danger. [...] with Jo, brain developed earlier than heart" (Alcott 361). She says about herself: "I haven't the least idea of loving him or anybody else'" (Alcott 404). Although she finally finds a partner in Bhaer, she needs more time to accommodate to her intimate feelings. Until she discovers her love for Bhaer, she is struggling with the concept of love and marriage, while her sisters are positively looking forward to both.

How other characters react towards Jo can be divided into four categories: her family's reactions, acquaintances' reactions, Laurie's reactions and other men's reactions. Firstly, Amy states about Jo: "You don't care to make people like you, to go into good society, and cultivate your manners and tastes. [...] You can go through the world with your elbows out and your nose in the air, and call it independence" (Alcott 289). Amy accuses Jo of behaving ignorantly and stubbornly and not caring about the impression she leaves in society. This accusation by Amy makes them both laugh and is soon forgotten, but it seems to bear some truth and bluntly describes Jo's behaviour. It shows that although "Jo's angles are much softened," she is still perceived as unconventional even by her sister. Secondly, Jo's reception in society is both positive and negative. On the one hand, Mrs Kirke and Miss Norton like Jo and enjoy her company so much that they lend clothes and try to promote her. On the other hand, society avoids her because of her manners. The Chesters, for example, perceive her as a "haughty, uninteresting creature' [who] was [to be] let severely alone" (Alcott 333). Strangers at Mrs Kirke's dinner table describe Jo as a "[h]andsome head, but no style.' 'Not a bit of it'" (Alcott 375). Those same strangers are surprised when discovering that Jo is a lively funny person: "no one dreamed the silent, haughty Miss March (for they think I am very stiff and cool, most of them; and so I am to whippersnappers) could dance and dress [...] it was fun to see them stare at me. I heard one of the young men tell another that he knew I'd been an actress" (Alcott 384). Jo chooses how she conducts herself and keeps the so called "whippersnappers" deliberately at a cool distance: "I *do* want to get into good society, only it isn't the same sort that Amy likes" (Alcott 376). Thirdly, Laurie admires Jo despite her odd appearance. He says: "What a refreshing spectacle you are, Jo" (Alcott 271), while "star[ing] at Jo's big pinafore" (Alcott 271). He falls in love with Jo but, after she rejects him and he recovers from this rebuff, marries Amy. It could be argued that he loved Jo because she saw something in him that no one else saw or because she took him under her protection and cherished his 'boyish soul.' It seems that Laurie confused a platonic appreciation and respect for Jo with intimate love. Thirdly, Laurie's friends' reactions towards her were that "[t]hey all liked Jo immensely, but never fell in love with her" (Alcott 240). While Meg and Amy had various admirers, Jo

was for a long time only loved by Laurie, who seemed to confuse his admiration with love. Mr Bhaer was the only man whose love for Jo proved genuine.

The last observation that remains to be discussed concerning part two is Jo's further character development. She evolves even more into a composed woman but nevertheless stays a tomboy, too. To her mother she says: "I'm not the scatterbrain I was; you may trust me, I'm sober and sensible enough for anyone's confidante now" (Alcott 486). She agrees to marry Bhaer, becomes mother of two children and is managing a huge household. This shows her willingness and ability to settle down and fulfil womanly tasks. However, "Jo carried her love of liberty and hate of conventionalities to [...] an unlimited extent" (Alcott 289), which is expressed by her choice to open a boys' school and live with a flock of boisterous spirited boys within the wilderness of a spacious house and garden. Her personal happy ending differs greatly from what she expected it to be when building her "castles in the air" (Alcott 544) as a girl. "The dream of filling home with comforts [...] had been for years Jo's most cherished castle in the air" (Alcott 385). Reality shows her as a hard working, free spirited woman who puts her own needs and wishes above social conventions and who found a husband who does that, too. She succeeds in surrounding herself with the 'boyish souls' she prefers. She not only finds them in her fosterlings and her two own boys but also in her husband. With lots of energy, fun and "the loving impetuosity which she never could outgrow" (Alcott 546), she concludes her story as a tomboy-woman.

### **3.2. Historical Perspective**

After analysing Jo through a contemporary lens and in comparison with her sisters, we will now turn to the historical gender roles of her time. To see what the ideal woman of the second half of the nineteenth century in the US was supposed to be like and what she was meant to do will intensify the impression that Jo is a truly exceptional and gender transgressing tomboy. It will also illustrate why "*Little Women* scorns social conformity and encourages independence and self-reliance for women" (Sage 395).

The nineteenth century was a landmark in women's history. On the one hand, a very traditional image of the ideal woman existed, while on the other hand, modernising forces pushed women towards outgrowing their previously permitted and limited role. For one thing, a fixed concept of the ideal woman and her chores limited to the private sphere narrowed her possibilities.

But even while the women's magazines and related literature encouraged this ideal of the perfect woman, forces were at work in the nineteenth century which impelled woman herself to change, to play a more creative role in society. The movements for social reform, westward migration, missionary activity, utopian communities, industrialism, the Civil War – all called forth responses from woman which differed from those she was trained to believe were hers by nature and divine decree. (Welter 173-174)

Due to economical, social, political and cultural developments like the American Civil War and the Industrial Revolution, women's roles changed rapidly. Changing living conditions created opportunities for more independence for women and a greater scope for their activities and functions in the public sphere. The implementation of democratic systems and their obvious inequalities led to the rise of feminism and a call for a more flexible perception of femininity (Duby and Perrot 12-13). The beginnings of tomboyism in the middle of the nineteenth century offered "an alternative and more physically active code of conduct" (Abate ix). However, although "tomboyism as both a cultural phenomenon and literary convention had become ubiquitous in the United States" (Abate ix) by the end of the century, it was still in its early stages of development around the time Louisa May Alcott published *Little Women* and with it one of the most famous tomboy characters of that time (Abate ix).

According to Yannella, the main foci of women during the Civil War were "the domestic effects of men going off to war, the vital wartime responsibilities of women, and the role of women as encouragers of patriotic feeling in men who resisted service" (Yannella 10). Men fought at the front, women at home. Suddenly, they had to manage and survive without their fathers, husbands and brothers. The exceptional situation required flexibility and the bending of gender conventions. Simultaneously, it provided women with more freedom and independence. After the war, when men returned home, women were put into their traditional place again. Three female archetypes were considered possible

roles for women: Madonna or Angel of the House, temptress and muse (Higonnet 283), with the Madonna being the most desirable and rewarding role.

Although everything was rapidly changing, society clung to the belief that

one thing at least remained the same – a true woman was a true woman, wherever she was found. If, anyone, male or female, dared to tamper with the complex of virtues which made up True Womanhood, he was damned immediately as an enemy of God, of civilization and of the Republic. It was fearful obligation, a solemn responsibility, which the nineteenth-century American woman had – to uphold the pillars of the temple with her frail white hand. (Welter 152)

A woman's fate and happiness depended on her fulfilling the prescribed role: "Üblicherweise wurden feminine Frauen als bewundernswerte, tugendhafte, glückliche oder belohnte Frauen dargestellt, während die vom Weiblichkeitsideal abweichenden Frauen als groteske, verdorbene, unglückliche oder bestrafte Frauen gestaltet wurden" (Higonnet 284). Women who strove for more than their limited roles were considered degenerated and only half-women (Welter 172-173). Nevertheless, due to women's discontent with their restricted scope of possibilities or their fear of being able to fulfil the role of the ideal woman, slowly "the True Woman evolved into the New Woman" (Welter 174).

The nineteenth century had clear normative expectations of an ideal or true woman. It "portrayed women's nature as innately virtuous, nurturing, and inclined toward the spiritual. [...] women and children belonged together in the home, itself now envisioned as a clean and virtuous sphere entirely separate from the dirty, morally suspect, male, public, and workplace world" (Leonardo 360). This naivety and purity ascribed to women is mirrored in Laurie's appraisal of them as being "simple-hearted girls" (Alcott 67). In these respects, Jo fulfils her part as a 'true woman.' She is moral, spiritual, nurses her loved ones when they are sick and works as a governess. At Mrs Kirke's house, she is completely situated in the private sphere, surrounded by children in the nursery. She is also the one that stays with Beth day and night to care for her. However, in Jo's description at the novel's beginning, she is presented with adjectives that would suit a nineteenth century man better than a woman of that time. Words like 'brown,' 'decided,' 'comical,' 'sharp,' 'fierce,' and 'thoughtful,' were mostly male connoted. Men were supposed to have a darker complexion than women,

whose fair skin was regarded as a feature of beauty. Skin colour thus symbolised his place in the public sphere and her place at home in the private sphere. Attributes like 'decided,' 'sharp,' 'fierce' and 'thoughtful,' also suited men more because "men were the movers, the doers, the actors. [While] [w]omen were passive, submissive responders" (Welter 159). Jo is also described as 'comical,' which is not necessarily a desirable description for a nineteenth century woman, who would prefer to be called graceful, cheerful and frail. Notions of aesthetics and beauty, core characteristics of true womanhood (Higonnet 296), cannot be found in Jo's description either.

Jo's tomboy nature partly prevents her from meeting social requirements, like the strict code of conduct:

The attributes of True Womanhood, [...] could be divided into four cardinal virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife – woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power. (Welter 152).

Jo is unquestionably pious and pure but domesticity is not one of her particular strengths and submissiveness is certainly not an attribute the reader would associate with her. By being pious, Jo fulfils a very important demand of true womanhood, as "[r]eligion or piety was the core of woman's virtue, the source of her strength" (Welter 152). She moreover argues that women "were supposed to keep busy at morally uplifting tasks. Fortunately most housework, if looked at it in true womanly fashion, could be regarded as uplifting" (Welter 164). However, Jo is not as pious as Meg with her "sweet and pious nature" (Alcott 17). Especially at the beginning of the novel, Jo needs Meg's and Beth's calming influence to obtain "the quiet expression so seldom seen on her restless face" (Alcott 17). Moreover, Jo's piety does not stop her from enjoying outdoors, action and even entering a very male sphere – the newspaper; which breaks with one reason why religion has such a high social value: "it did not take a woman away from her 'proper sphere,' her home" (Welter 153). Jo is strictly pure without even wasting a single thought on "philandering," as she calls it. On the one hand, this is socially beneficial for her as "[p]urity was as essential as piety to a young woman, its absence as unnatural and unfeminine" (Welter 154). On the other hand, most unmarried women's main purpose in life

was to find a husband which renders Jo's complete indifference to this topic deviant.

Jo has learned to manage domestic tasks but she lays no special emphasis on domesticity and seems not to be particularly good at it at first. In part one, Beth constantly adjusts Jo's materials and working basket when the latter is knitting, darning, sewing or tries to accomplish other chores connected to linen; while in part two, Jo patches Bhaer's clothes and it comes to her naturally. We do not know about the quality of her work but she is at least willing and able to fulfil these crafts. Her first attempt at preparing dinner is a complete failure (Alcott 128-129), but as she is able to manage a huge household, she might have learned how to master cooking in the end. Jo is also able to cheerfully tidy up Laurie's room and make him feel comfortable, which was considered an important ability: "Home was supposed to be a cheerful place [...]. Woman was expected to dispense comfort and cheer" (Welter 163). Meg, for example finds her vocation in being at home: "Meg learned, that a woman's happiest kingdom is home, her highest honour the art of ruling it not as a queen, but as a wife and mother" (Alcott 444).

Due to Jo's talent for nursing, she fulfils another important part of true womanhood: "One of the most important functions of woman as comforter was her role as nurse. [...] the sickroom called for the exercise of her higher qualities of patience, mercy and gentleness as well as for her housewifely arts. She could thus fulfil her dual feminine function – beauty and usefulness" (Welter 163); with the exception of beauty, this requirement fully applies to Jo. Her improving skills in domestic tasks mirror her constant development into a woman. With the decrease of tomboyish characteristics, she adopts more womanly connoted characteristics. However, Jo always values practicality over perfection and aesthetics; household chores are not her life's centre but a necessity that needs to be done. This shows again that she retains some of her tomboyish characteristics and flexibility as well as "her love of liberty and hate of conventionalities" (Alcott 289).

The fourth attribute of True Womanhood – submissiveness, "perhaps the most feminine virtue expected of women" (Welter 158) – does certainly not apply to Jo. "[A] spirit of obedience and submission, pliability of temper, and humility of

mind, are required from her" (*The Young Lady's Book* 28) if Jo wants to be recognized as truly womanly. Although she is working hard on becoming more modest, she possesses neither "a spirit of obedience and submission" nor a "pliability of temper." Quite to the contrary, she is strong, decided, critical and partly even stubborn. This is exemplified distinctly in the following quote: "cried poor Jo rebelliously, for her spirit was far less piously submissive than Beth's" (Alcott 416). Beth, on the other hand, "was too bashful to go to school; [...] Beth went faithfully on by herself, and did the best she could. She was a housewifely little creature, and helped Hannah keep home neat and comfortable for the workers, never thinking of any reward but to be loved" (Alcott 45); she is the truly submissive woman and a sharp contrast to Jo. Amy, too, "managed to escape reprimands by being a model of deportment" (Alcott 47). In another situation, when Jo is asked why she behaves dismissively towards a man of high social rank, she answers: "'it's easier for me to risk my life for a person than to be pleasant to him when I don't feel like it. It's a great misfortune to have such strong likes and dislikes, isn't it?'" (Alcott 329).

Then again, Jo can be submissive and pliable towards people who have earned her respect, do not endanger her personal freedom and do not push her towards becoming someone that she is not; the best examples are her parents and Bhaer. She turns to her parents for guidance and direction and follows their advice. In Bhaer, she chooses an older, experienced husband from whom she can learn and whom she respects. He shares her dislike of conventionalities and her love of the 'boyish soul,' whereby her freedom is guaranteed. To Mr Laurence she says: "We are only girls, but we should be glad to help if we could" (Alcott 61); her reference to her sisters and herself as 'only girls' could possibly be read as a slight submissiveness on her part, too.

Traditional female activities of the nineteenth century were playing the piano or violin, singing, dancing, drawing, painting and water colouring (Higonnet 292). The true woman was also "expected to have a special affinity for flowers" (Welter 165). Beth especially likes flowers and plays the piano virtuously, Meg enjoys making herself new clothes and accessories and Amy "had a decided talent for drawing, and was never so happy as when copying flowers, designing fairies, or illustrating stories" (Alcott 47). The only womanly activity Jo is

proficient in is dancing. When she sings, “Jo wandered through the airs at her own sweet will, always coming out at the wrong place with a croak or a quaver that spoilt the most pensive tune” (Alcott 14-15), while the other women produce melodious sounds. Jo prefers writing, which is not only regarded as an intellectual task mostly pursued by men; but she moreover produces sensation stories, which are seen as something endangering girls: “the nineteenth century knew that girls *could* be ruined by a book. The seduction stories regard ‘exciting and dangerous books’ as contributory causes of disaster” (Welter 166). Her ambition to earn money and become financially independent causes her to produce stories regarded as rubbish by society and Bhaer. It is him who converts Jo to ceasing to write such stories.

A typical nineteenth century woman’s aim was to marry; Jo’s aim was “to keep out of mischief” (Alcott 360), as she calls everything that has to do with intimate love. When she talks about marriage with her sisters, she suggests: “Then we’ll be old maids” (Alcott 110); and when Laurie expresses his fear that Jo might be taken away by a man some day, she reassures him by saying: “Don’t be alarmed; I’m not one of the agreeable sort. Nobody will want me” (Alcott 275). However, “[v]ery rarely, a ‘woman of genius’ was absolved from the necessity of marriage, [...] Most often, however, if girls proved ‘difficult,’ marriage and a family were regarded as a cure” (Welter 170); which also turns out to be the case for Jo. Despite her aversion to marriage, she marries in the end and finds: “Marriage is an excellent thing, after all. I wonder if I should blossom out as half as well as you have, if I tried?” (Alcott 483). At the novel’s conclusion, the very stubborn, impulsive tomboy concedes to the most typical life choice a woman of the nineteenth century could take: marriage and becoming a mother.

In conclusion, Jo knows what she wants and conducts herself accordingly, no matter what conventions she disregards by doing so. She is a strong female character, a tomboy of indomitable “‘up again and take another’ spirit” (Alcott 386). She is compared to the gull, “strong and wild, fond of the storm and the wind, flying far out to the sea, and happy all alone” (Alcott 417-18). Jo does not only feel, think and behave in a boyish or gender-flexible but also in a norm-flexible and deviant way. Her personality does not only break with gender conventions and roles but also with general social norms: “Jo never, never

would learn to be proper; [...] she just put both hands into his, [...] and stooping down, kissed her Friedrich under the umbrella” (Alcott 534). Her tomboy character introduces modernity and social change.

## **4. *Five on a Treasure Island***

The novel *Five on a Treasure Island* is the first book of an adventure series published by British author Enid Blyton in 1942 (British Women Writers 69). It tells the story of the three siblings Julian, Dick and Anne, their tomboy cousin George and her dog Timothy, who spend their summer holidays together. Although the four are only twelve, eleven and ten years old, they are mostly left alone. Their “[p]arents are absent figures [...], appearing at the margins to deposit their children at school or on holiday” (British Women Writers 70). The children get to know each other and start to explore the surroundings of George’s parents’ little cottage at Kirrin Bay. On a small island nearby, they discover a treasure which they need to defend against intruders. In Blyton’s books, “[t]he tomboy is a recurring figure [...] whose negated femininity permits a certain freedom of action” (British Women Writers 71). In the case of this novel, George enjoys enormous freedom but also suffers from self chosen solitude. She grows to learn to enjoy company and the value of sharing throughout the novel. From a very strong driving character, George shifts more into the background to leave the stage to the boy Julian, only to enter the spotlight again towards the novel’s end.

### **4.1. Analysis**

#### **4.1.1. General Observations**

George can be identified as a tomboy as firstly, the requirements of our working definition apply to her and secondly, seven of the eight defining criteria established beforehand are completely or partly met. As *Five on a Treasure Island* is not as extensive as *Little Women*, the characters are not as complex. This means that only a limited amount of character development can be observed. Furthermore, the novel does not provide conclusive information on George’s dating behaviour and out-group perception. The four children have very limited contact to characters outside their group as they are located in “an enclosed children’s world” (British Women Writers 70) of their own.

The first impression the reader gains from George is through descriptions and reactions of others. That she is somehow exceptional is already hinted at when the siblings discover her name: “I wonder what Georgina’s like. Funny name, isn’t it? More like a boy’s than a girl’s” (Blyton 8). Their first meeting is thwarted by George’s absence. Her mother, aunt to the others, explains George’s behaviour:

‘Oh the naughty girl! I told her to wait in the garden for you,’ said her aunt. ‘Now she’s gone off somewhere. I must tell you, children, you may find George a bit difficult at first. She’s always been one on her own.’ (Blyton 12)

‘Well, she’s a funny little girl,’ said her aunt. She can be very rude and haughty. She’s kind at heart, very loyal and absolutely truthful. Once she makes friends with you, she will always be your friend. But she finds it very difficult indeed to make friends, which is a great pity.’” (Blyton 13-14)

Despite not meeting her directly, George is already singled out as a “naughty girl,” “a bit difficult at first,” “rude and haughty” but also “kind at heart, very loyal and absolutely truthful.” Nevertheless, George’s deviant behaviour causes her mother to deliver justifications, explanations and excuses. This particular focus of attention makes George an overwhelmingly present character without even appearing.

When George does finally appear, she is likened to men twice; first to a boy, then to her father:

The child in the opposite bed sat up and looked across at Anne. She had very short curly hair, almost as short as a boy’s. Her face was burnt a dark-brown with the sun, and her very blue eyes looked as bright as forget-me-nots in her face. But her mouth was rather sulky, and she had a frown like her father’s. (Blyton 14-15)

The application of male connotations and George’s entrenchment within a semantic field of masculinity continues when the three siblings discuss her nickname: “Do you call her ‘George’?” asked Anne, in surprise. ‘I thought her name was Georgina.’ ‘So it is,’ said her aunt” (Blyton 12). Although George is a girl called Georgina, she forces her environment to use the masculine version of her name: “No,’ she said. ‘I’m not Georgina.’ [...] ‘I’m George,’ [...] ‘I shall only answer if you call me George. [...] You’re to call me George. Then I’ll speak to you. But I shan’t if you don’t” (Blyton 15). Additionally to her male connoted

name, she is likened to a man: “She can handle a boat like a man” (Blyton 33); and called “Master:” “Boat’s all ready, Master George” (Blyton 27) which “seemed so queer to the other children to hear Georgina called ‘Master George!’” (Blyton 34). The occasional usage of expressive language like in this situation: “George flung open the door and marched out with her head high” (Blyton 16) completes the impression of George as a very energetic, unusual and impulsive girl with a striking resemblance to boys.

George’s gender bending conduct is intensified through the sharp contrast to Anne. While George dislikes her sex and its limits, Anne enthusiastically praises her possibilities as a girl: “[d]on’t you simply hate being a girl?’ asked George. ‘No, of course not,’ said Anne. You see. I do like pretty frocks. I love my dolls” (Blyton 15). In their spare time, the two girls entertain themselves with completely different activities: “Anne went to get one of her dolls to play with. [...] George took up a beautiful little boat she was carving out of a piece of wood” (Blyton 49). In another situation, Anne is helpless and fearful “[b]ut George was not at all dismayed. [...] She pulled steadily at the oars and soon came near to the rocks” (Blyton 51). While Anne cannot even imagine how to contribute to resolve a difficult situation, George is the one who actively brings the other three children, the boys included, out of that situation. Anne is also excluded from the ‘everyone’ that includes the two boys and George: “[e]veryone took turns at rowing except Anne, who was not strong enough with the oars to row against the tide” (Blyton 47). In this case, it is not George that seems to be the exceptional character but Anne. She is the only one of the four that is not able to contribute. On the other hand, it can be argued that George is still the most unusual character as she is included in the group of boys despite being a girl. A last example that distinctly shows the contrast between George and Anne is their reaction after Dick’s accident: “Leaving George behind with Tim, valiantly attacking the big door[,] [...] Anne dipped her hanky into the kettle of water and dabbed Dick’s cheek gently” (Blyton 85). George is more concerned with the discovery of the treasure than with Dick’s wellbeing. She is moreover “valiantly attacking” the door which is clearly juxtaposed to Anne who “dab[s] Dick’s cheek gently.” Like in *Little Women*, contrasts between Anne and George help to highlight George’s tomboy nature.

#### 4.1.2. Analysis Grid

George fulfils a first tomboy defining criterion by behaving boyishly (Table I: Tomboy Characteristics – Analysis Grid). Her masculinity is not as explicitly addressed as Jo's but she still exhibits five obvious traits usually associated with male behaviour. George is “not a coward,” does not cry, uses tools, is strong and is an active character. First, George states: “I don't tell untruths. I think it's being a coward if you don't tell the truth. I'm not a coward” (Blyton 18). According to the Cobuild Dictionary, cowards “are easily frightened and avoid dangerous or difficult situations” two attributes that do not apply to George. Quite the opposite, she is often the first to eagerly enter a dangerous situation. Second, she prefers not to cry because she regards it as feminine: “I never cry, you know, because boys don't and I like to be a boy” (Blyton 22). Third, George possesses a pocket knife which she skilfully uses to carve or to open things: “Then she took out her big strong pocket-knife and inserted it between the cupboard door and the door-wall. She forced back the blade and the lock of the cupboard suddenly snapped!” (Blyton 53-54); and “[b]ut once George began to work at it with her pocket-knife, scraping away the rust, it began to loosen” (Blyton 59).

A fourth masculine characteristic is that George is described as strong. Not only is she stronger and more expert at rowing and swimming than the boys, she also shows physical strength in non-sportive activities. For example, “George hauled [Tim] into the boat” (Blyton 70) from out of the water, which requires considerable strength. She is able to use an axe purposefully, “attacking the door. She had smashed it well around the lock” (Blyton 86). George is also recognized as strong by other characters: “[Julian] handed the axe to George. ‘You can do a bit of chopping while I'm gone’” (Blyton 85). Although George is a girl, Julian entrusts her with the axe. Moreover, Julian rather asks George to help him carry a heavy food box, not Dick who is as old as George but apparently not considered as strong as she is: “George and Julian staggered up the cliff with the heavy box” (Blyton 71).

A fifth masculine attribute is George's drive for action: “I'll go first. Anyone got a torch? It looks pretty dark down there” (Blyton 52). In this situation, George is brave enough to lead the group into unknown dark terrain that might have

frightened other children. Furthermore, she instantly goes after her dog, when he falls down a pit. George does not waste a single thought about asking one of the boys to rescue Tim. In another situation, instead of sitting passively in their small fishing boat and waiting for the boys to act, “George pushed the boat off into the surf and then jumped in herself” (Blyton 27), while the boys are waiting for her to act. When Julian and George are captured by treasure hunters, George is the one who communicates with them while Julian does not say a word. When she is forced to send a fraud message to Anne and Dick she refuses passionately: “‘I won’t,’ said George, her face furious. ‘I won’t. You can’t make me do a thing like that’” (Blyton 89). Although the villains threaten to shoot Tim, she stays calm and keeps up her resistance by outsmarting them: “she signed her name. But instead of writing ‘George’ she put ‘Georgina.’ She knew the others would feel certain she would never sign herself that” (Blyton 90). According to British Women Writers, “[t]he girls of the Famous Five [...] are left out of the more exciting and potentially dangerous adventures” (71). This is not true for George in *Five on a Treasure Island* as she is not regarded as a girl but rather a boy a defiant, gender role-bending tomboy.

The second tomboy characteristic from the analysis grid, apparel, proves to be true for George as well. When Anne tells George that she looks like a boy, George is genuinely pleased: “‘Do I really?’ said George, the frown leaving her face for a moment” (Blyton 15). George states explicitly that she is not interested in dresses: “‘Pooh! Fancy bothering about pretty frocks,’ said George, in a scornful voice. ‘And dolls!’” (Blyton 15). Strengthening this statement, “George put on jeans too, and a boy’s jersey” (Blyton 16).

George, who desperately wishes to be a boy, fulfils the third tomboy category – expressing a deviant gender identity. Her mother explains about her: “‘George hates being a girl, and we have to call her George, as if she were a boy’” (Blyton 12). George confirms: “‘I hate being a girl. I won’t be’” (Blyton 15). Simultaneously, she also hates being treated like a girl. This can be observed when Julian tries “slipping his arm through his sulky little cousin’s. She pulled away from him at once. ‘Don’t do that’” (Blyton 18). In another situation, she is similarly treated like Anne, which George does not appreciate either: “George

looked as if she didn't want to be put with Anne, and classed as a girl" (Blyton 71).

George's wish to be a boy is partly fulfilled because she is treated like a boy by the others. As could be observed earlier, Julian asks George to carry the heaviest box with him. Moreover, none of the boys even thinks about helping George into a boat or up a wreck, which they do for Anne. George is treated as a fellow boy. When, for example, "Julian decided to go and tell the others" he only calls for the boys: "George! Dick! There's something queer out on the rocks beyond the island!" (Blyton 42). Yet again, Anne is not included in "the others" while George is and the question remains whether Anne or George is the unusual character because the novel does not feature any other conventional girl characters who could provide a comparison.

Dick is aware of how strongly George wishes to be a boy and tries to cheer her up by referring to her as a boy: "Bad luck, old girl. I mean, old boy!' George managed to smile. 'I've been behaving like a girl,' she said, half-ashamed" (Blyton 68). On the one hand, George is pleased by his consideration; on the other hand, she is ashamed of herself because of acting like a girl. When George signs the fraud message with "Georgina," Dick immediately knows that something is wrong because "[y]ou know how she hates being a girl, and having a girl's name" (Blyton 91).

A fourth tomboy-defining category, which is having male playmates, is not as easy to locate in George's presentation. On the one hand, George is not used to having human friends in general. Therefore, there is no possibility to decide whether she prefers male or female playmates or both. On the other hand, George discovers that she does enjoy spending time with her newly acquainted cousins. This indicates that she has no preference for either female or male playmates but enjoys the company of both genders as long as she is not treated like a girl herself. George reflects about that: "I used to think it was much, much nicer always to do things on my own," (Blyton 33) and decides that having someone to spend time with is much nicer than being alone. That George does not solely prefer being in male company can be observed in her showing Anne how to swim: "George found time to help Anne to swim" (Blyton 32) and her consent to enter a girls-only boarding school with Anne after initially thinking: "It

must be awful to be one of a crowd, and to have other girls all laughing and yelling round you. I should hate it” (Blyton 31).

The only criterion of tomboys George does not fulfil is the assumption that tomboys like ‘girls’ and boys’ stuff’ equally, an assumption that is based on the notion of inclusion. George categorically rejects anything that is associated with girls: “I don’t like doing the things that girls do” (Blyton 15). She detests dolls. She is not a tomboy that equally engages in gendered activities of both genders but vehemently excludes ‘girls’ stuff.’ However, by meeting Anne and spending time with a girl, George seems to slightly change her perception of girls and their company as well as ‘girlish’ activities. It will still be argued that George mainly dislikes ‘girls’ stuff’ but a faint development towards gender inclusion can be observed.

Up to this point, it was possible to find four tomboy characteristics that apply to George: boyish behaviour, boyish apparel, wishing to be a boy and male playmates; and a fifth category that does not apply to her: an interest in boys’ as well as girls’ activities. George therefore fulfils the second hypothesis which requires a character to meet at least four out of eight tomboy criteria to be classified as a tomboy. We will find the fulfilment of two more criteria which are an interest in ‘boys’ stuff’ and a preference of sports, outdoors and action. The criterion of gender flexibility is partly met.

George very obviously enjoys activities usually considered boyish as she explicitly states: “I like doing things that boys do. I can climb better than any boy, and swim faster too. I can sail a boat as well as any fisher-boy on this coast” (Blyton 15). Thereby, she not only fulfils a sixth category of the tomboy analysis grid but even excels at it. Especially rowing, which acquires not only skills but also strength, is one of her prides: “She took the oars. She rowed splendidly, and the boat shot along over the blue bay” (Blyton 27). When Julian asks George to let him row in order to relieve her, she only reluctantly accepts:

‘Here, let me take the oars for a bit, George. You can’t do all the rowing.’ ‘I can,’ said George [...] ‘I’ll just take you by this rocky bit and then you can take the oars till we come to another awkward piece.’ [...] Julian rowed well, but not so strong as George. (Blyton 28)

Next to rowing, swimming and climbing, George also enjoys diving (Blyton 29), carving wood (Blyton 49) and fishing: “I’m going fishing,’ said George” (Blyton 16). In contrast, Anne cannot do these stereotypically male activities or needs help doing them.

A seventh category of the tomboy analysis grid is a preference of sports, the outdoors and action. It is obvious from various text samples that George completely fulfils this criterion. Unlike Jo, who just enjoys the outdoors and rough and tumble play, George excels at sportive activities: “the boys found that George was a much better swimmer than they were. She was very strong and very fast, and she could swim under water, too, holding her breath for ages” (Blyton 25). In a direct comparison, George even beats Julian, who is a year older than her: “George took a beautiful header off the end of the boat, deep down into the water. The others watched her swimming strongly downwards, holding her breath. [...] [Julian] was not so good at swimming deep under water as George was, and he couldn’t go down so far” (Blyton 29). Dick on the other hand does not even try to dive down to the wreck. He is not compared to George because he is no equal competitor. George is also the first to risk something and enter dangerous situations. She climbs up the wreck first: “Then George clambered up the side of the wreck like a monkey. She was a marvel at climbing [...] Anne had to be helped up” (Blyton 52). The distinct contrast to Anne highlights George’s tomboy personality even more.

Concerning gender flexibility, the last tomboy defining category, George only partly fulfils its requirements. According to Ahlqvist et al., “tomboys were more likely to mention flexibility and gender-based interests and activities” (574). In George’s case, “gender-based interests and activities” for boys are the only activities interesting and worthwhile to her, while stereotypically girlish interests and activities are carefully avoided. Her intolerance towards girlish activities and behaviour contrasts her own gender-bending conduct. Although she is transgressing her gender-role and proves gender-flexible in this regard, she exhibits excessive rigidity by completely refusing traditionally female activities and interests. Unfortunately, her gender flexibility can only be observed concerning herself as no other characters transgress gender-conventions. In the section ‘Historical Perspective,’ it will be shown what kind of behaviour was

traditionally expected from women in the middle of the twentieth century. At this point, it can only be anticipated that George does not fulfil those expectations.

#### **4.1.3. Working Hypotheses**

So far, we were able to find six of the eight tomboy characteristics from the analysis grid (Table I: Tomboy Characteristics – Analysis Grid) completely, one partly and one not at all true for George. Apart from that, the working definition applies to George as well, which means that two of the three tomboy hypotheses are true for George. Subsequently, the three other hypotheses that were established in section two will be discussed: out-group perception, the influence of family background and a delayed interest in dating. Following that, it will be discussed how other characters react to George and the development of her character.

George definitely regards herself as an outsider by thinking: “I’m different from my cousins” (Blyton 69). She behaves like an outsider, too, by distancing herself from other children and by not showing any signs of tolerance towards others. At first, she seems to have a very strong out-group perception that includes everyone but herself. She has no friends until she meets her three cousins, whom she dislikes before they even arrive: “Now I’ve got to put up with a silly girl who likes frocks and dolls, and two stupid boy-cousins!” (Blyton 15). She does not seem to be interested in other children at all. Potential playmates are kept at a distance, either because George has nothing to share or because she does not want to share e.g. her island or Tim. Children, except for Julian, Dick and Anne, are such an alien factor in George’s life that they are not really mentioned in the novel. The only other child that is presented by name is Alf, the fisher-boy who looks after Tim for George. However, George pays him her pocket money for his service instead of asking him for help out of friendship or sympathy. She is also not playing with him although he is a fisher boy and capable of rowing and most likely swimming. This suggests that Alf and George are either not interested in each other as playmates or that Georges regards him as a servant rather than an equal to play with. The latter consideration seems to be true as Alf calls George “Master” several times. Therefore, we can

state that George does not meet our third hypothesis of exhibiting greater acceptance towards out-group members and possible gender transgressions.

The fourth hypothesis, which states that a family crisis could intensify tomboyish behaviour, seems not to be true for George either. Although her father is not away at the war front or dead, he is yet absent, which could be seen as a sort of family crisis. He works very hard on writing a book and experiences relentless pressure in providing for his family. As such, he has neither patience nor understanding for his defiant daughter. To his nephews and niece he appeals: “maybe you will knock a little common-sense into George!” (Blyton 13). When George rather wants to go fishing than showing her cousins around, he “looked up at once. ‘You are not,’ he said. ‘You are going to show a few good manners for a change, and take your cousins to the bay’” (Blyton 16). George’s reactions towards her father are as impatient and hostile as his: “‘It isn’t nonsense, Father!’ cried George indignantly” (Blyton 105). Therefore, their relationship can be described as distant and troubled. They are rather similar in character, which might explain their animosity towards one another: “He and George were really very alike to look at. Both looked ugly when they sulked and frowned. Both were good to look at when they laughed or smiled!” (Blyton 107). This difficult father-daughter relationship – which actively discourages tomboyish behaviour – seems not to increase George’s tomboyish conduct. George’s opposition to her father increases her defiant behaviour but does not appear to have a direct effect on her preference of being and acting like a boy.

As George does not have any social connections other than with her family, there are no significant data implying her opinion of dating. Furthermore, she is only eleven years old, when dating probably does not play any role yet. Therefore, we cannot substantiate the fifth hypothesis that was established due to Jo in *Little Women*, which suggests that tomboys develop an interest in dating later than their non-tomboy peers.

The cousin’s reactions towards George change considerably throughout the book. At first, before they have even met her, she is regarded with curiosity: “The children thought that Georgina sounded rather exciting” (Blyton 12); then with slight discomfort: “‘Isn’t she queer. Not waiting to welcome us. Not coming in to supper. Not even in yet!’” (Blyton 14). After meeting her, “[t]hey thought

she was the queerest girl they had ever known” (Blyton 20); and eventually, they start liking George very much. Dick does not really give explicit opinions towards George, his reactions can only be observed within group responses of all three children, like the above “The children thought.” Anne undergoes the emotional process described. Before they have met, she is “thinking that her new cousin was most extraordinary” (Blyton 15). Then, Anne starts disliking George’s rude behaviour and tries to hurt her by saying: “They are real boys, not pretend boys, like you” (Blyton 15) and explains to her cousins: “She’s awfully queer” (Blyton 16). Anne’s dislike decreases with George’s change and willingness to show the three siblings around. Julian is tolerant towards George and tries to make her feel more comfortable: “I don’t care what I call you. George is a nice name, I think. I don’t much like Georgina” (Blyton 15). Good-naturedly Julian “thought George was rude and ill-mannered, but he couldn’t help rather liking the look of the straight-backed, short-haired little girl, with her brilliant blue eyes and sulky mouth” (Blyton 17). It is him who makes it possible that George opens up to her cousins by buying her ice-cream and convincing her to take it in exchange for playing with Tim. Julian and the others’ efforts to reach out to George are successful. When she states “I was just thinking how nice you all are and how I wished I could be like you” (Blyton 69), Julian replies: “‘You’re an awfully nice person,’ said Julian, surprisingly. ‘You can’t help being an only child. They’re always a bit queer, [...] You’re a most interesting person’” (Blyton 69). When the four children get to know each other better, they very soon enjoy each other’s company.

Both George’s parents do not seem to understand their daughter. While her mother appears to love her daughter, her father treats her roughly and in a distanced manner. Her mother seems to be at a loss with her socially awkward daughter: “I expect George will go into the sulks now. Dear, dear, she is such a difficult child!” (Blyton 26) and “I’m sure your cousins must think you are a queer girl never to want your mother to go with you” (Blyton 33). However, mother and daughter still have a better functioning relationship than father and daughter. The latter is almost non-existent and very difficult as we saw before, when George’s family background was discussed. The hypothesis that a girl’s behaviour gets increasingly tomboyish due to a family crisis or the absence of the father could not be substantiated. What can be observed is that George’s

bad temper and dismissive conduct decrease as soon as her father changes and opens up to her (Blyton 107-109). The following interactions might be life-changing and character-softening for George because they present positive reactions of George's father towards her:

Then he ruffled George's short curly hair. 'And I'm proud of you, too, George,' he said. 'You're as good as a boy any day!' 'Oh Father!' said George, going red with surprise and pleasure. She smiled at him and he smiled back. (Blyton 107)

'You shall have [Tim], my dear!' said her father, slipping his arm round George, much to her surprise. (Blyton 108)

George was overjoyed about Tim. She flung her arms round her father's neck and hugged him, a thing she had not done for a long time. He looked astonished but very pleased. (Blyton 109)

That George allows her father to "slip[...] his arm round" her and that she "flung her arms round her father's neck and hugged him" indicates a change in their relationship towards more openness and softness.

Only two reactions of distanced characters towards George can be observed in *Five on a Treasure Island*. One reaction of others is implicitly given by George: "Lots of people don't like me, now I come to think of it" (Blyton 17). The second feedback she evokes comes from a very impressed policeman after George destroyed the villain's motorboat: "Fierce young lady, isn't she, that Miss Georgina?" he said. 'Done this job pretty well'" (Blyton 109).

All these reactions towards George concern her aberrant and deviant behaviour rather than her boyish conduct. That she desperately wishes to be a boy seems to be interesting, but not the main point of interest. She provokes the strongest reactions when she does not care about others and neglects all rules of conduct. This is similar to what was observed in *Little Women*. Jo is mostly criticised for behaving in a rude and haughty way, only her sisters scold her for behaving boyishly. It is interesting that our two tomboy characters elicit negative reactions because of their 'bad' manners not because they behave boyishly, prefer 'boys' stuff,' the outdoors, sports, male playmates or match the other tomboy defining categories.

George undergoes an accelerated character development. In only a couple of days she evolves from a wayward, sulky girl to a friendly person who is willing

to share what she owns and to support her friends. Her attitude towards others changes because Anne, Dick and Julian give her friendship. George states: “They are making me more like I ought to be” (Blyton 69). According to British Women Writers, in Blyton’s books “[c]hildren serve as one another’s companions, guides [sic] rescuers, tutors, and occasional tormentors” (70). That is what happens in *Five on a Treasure Island* as well. Adults are absent, so the children assume their responsibilities in socialising each other. In the following, George’s general development, her epiphany about her defensive conduct, her discovery of the joys of sharing, her attitude towards Anne and her opinion about boarding school will be presented.

The grumpy and hostile George presented in most of the quotations above can also reveal a soft, affectionate and grateful side. Instead of showing her usually moody grimace “[t]he little girl smiled, and her face altered at once, and became sunny and pretty” (Blyton 21). She is thankful for her cousins’ company and expresses these feelings: “‘I’ve had a lovely day, too,’ said George rather gruffly. ‘Thanks to you. I’m glad you all came’” (Blyton 30). While George immediately pushed away Julian’s arm the first time he tried “slipping his arm through his sulky little cousin’s” (Blyton 18), she now accepts his friendly gesture: “He slipped his arm round her. For once in a way George didn’t push it away. She felt comforted. Tears came into her eyes, and she angrily tried to blink them away” (Blyton 66). At the novel’s end, George reflects about her earlier behaviour and opinion: “‘to think I hated the idea of you all coming here to stay!’ she said. ‘I was going to be such a beast to you!’” (Blyton 110). George is not only changing, she is also aware of doing so and happy with that development.

For the first time in her life, George consciously realizes the adverse effects of her dismissive behaviour. She expresses the feeling of wishing to be more like her good-natured cousins:

‘I like my three cousins awfully. I like them because they talk and laugh and are always cheerful and kind. I wish I was like them. I’m sulky and bad-tempered and fierce, and no wonder Father doesn’t like me and scolds me so often.’ (Blyton 69)

George understands that life would have been much more enjoyable for her had she opened up to others: “I think I’d have been much nicer if I hadn’t been on

my own so much,' thought George to herself, as she looked down at Julian's bent head" (Blyton 69).

George gradually learns to share and to enjoy doing so. As an only child "[i]t wasn't her nature to share anything. She had always been an only child, a lonely, rather misunderstood little girl, fierce and hot-tempered" (Blyton 24). Furthermore, she feels like having nothing to share and, unwilling to owe someone a debt, she repudiates any friendly gestures towards her: "It's mean to take from people if you can't give even a little back" (Blyton 23). While this last example suggests that George has pride as well as high moral principles she does not want to violate, another quote exhibits that George also refuses to share because of a feeling of power and utmost importance: "She had always felt quite important before when she had haughtily refused to take any of the other children to see Kirrin Island. It felt much nicer somehow to have consented to row her cousins there" (Blyton 33). George's change of thinking about sharing can be observed in this quote. She starts to open up to her cousins, to trust them and to become sure that by sharing she wins as much as the others: "[f]or the first time George began to understand that sharing pleasures doubles their joy" (Blyton 46). Her mother is glad about this development: "I'm pleased that George is going to share something with you" (Blyton 33). In the end of the novel, George has altered so much that she even legally splits Kirrin Island and Castle among herself and her cousins: "I've discovered that it's fun to share things" (Blyton 111).

George's change in her attitude towards Anne is remarkable. At first, she does not want to be associated with the girlish Anne, then George starts to care for her. George, who usually keeps to herself, exhibits warm feelings by hugging Anne: "[t]hen George did a surprising thing for her. She gave Anne a hug! Then she immediately looked most ashamed of herself, for she felt sure that no boy would have done that! And she always tried to act like a boy" (Blyton 26). When Anne is afraid to sleep alone, George gives in for Anne's sake and decides to sleep at her side although George would prefer sleeping somewhere else. Anne accepts George's gesture thankfully: "Anne thought that George was getting nicer and nicer!" (Blyton 71). In the end, George even treats Anne like a little

sister: “‘Come on, Anne!’ [...] ‘Bed for you. We’ll cuddle up together’” (Blyton 83) and pulls away Tim from Anne so that her sleep is not disturbed (Blyton 83).

A last remarkable change of character George exhibits is her opinion about boarding school. According to Abbate, a “common paradigm for tomboy taming, especially in narratives written for children, was the relocation of a gender-bending character to a strict boarding school or home of urban relatives” (xx). This is what happens in *Five on a Treasure Island* as well. When Anne first recommends it to George: “[i]t would be good for you, George” (Blyton 31), George completely rejects the idea: “[i]t must be awful to be one of a crowd, and to have other girls all laughing and yelling round you. I should hate it” (Blyton 31). In the end, she agrees with Anne’s suggestion: “[w]ell, I’ll go then. I always said I wouldn’t. I will because I see now how much better and happier it is to be with others than all by myself” (Blyton 110). George accepts that being alone most of the time does not do her any good and that it feels better to be with others. She has become not only more open towards others but also more self-conscious and reflective.

Her development is not as complex as Jo’s but still easily observable. Like Jo, George has not stopped being a tomboy but her manners towards others have softened and her conduct has become friendlier.

## 4.2. Historical Perspective

In the previous section, it was established that George is a tomboy, according to contemporary studies about real-life tomboys. The current section will provide a brief overview of the development of women’s roles in Britain from World War I to World War II. It will also describe ideas of what a typical woman of the first half of the twentieth century had to be like. Tomboys had become more common by this time, due to the fact that women gained a wider scope of action and war times required them to undertake men’s jobs. However, tomboys in general were still the exception to the rule and were regarded as an exotic aberration. The first aviatrixes come to mind when tomboys during the two World Wars are discussed. Tomboy George remains a gender-bending

character, too, who is situated in the indistinct twilight between girlhood and boyhood and well apart from hegemonic discourses.

In George's case, two circumstances render the application of a historical perspective more difficult: her young age and the very contrary expectations regarding women in wartime. George is not a woman but a young girl not even in her teens. It is therefore more difficult to compare her to established women's roles. Nevertheless, cultural norms already operate in children and George's three cousins perfectly display the gender conventions of their time. At their young age, they already assume or imitate what they believe to be appropriate behaviour for their gender. The second difficulty in analysing how George fits into gender conventions is that due to the war, more than one female ideal existed. Different to the Victorian era, where one clearly defined picture of the true woman existed, the range of possibilities for women widens in the twentieth century. Next to wife and mother, a woman could become a factory worker or nurse, among others. This was already partly possible in the nineteenth century but becomes more common in the twentieth century. In Britain, middle- and upper-class women could even join the military forces and protect the home front. What has to be kept in mind is that these possibilities were mostly limited to war time and ceased to exist in peaceful times. Therefore, the dominant discourse for women remained that of a housewife and mother, but more women than before started challenging these traditional roles.

At first glance, not much had changed from the role of the true woman in Victorian times to the turn of the twentieth century. According to German, "When the First World War broke out in 1914, the position of women [in Britain] was defined very narrowly and traditionally. The two major areas of employment were domestic service and in the North the textile industry, where [working-class] women, even after marriage, worked in large numbers" (10). In the middle-class, married women were expected to quit paid work and "devote themselves to their family and home, of which the man was undisputedly the head" (German 10). Their apparel was also strictly separated from men's: "Their hair was long, as were their skirts, and trousers were rarely worn and considered exotic and dangerous" (German 11). On the other hand, careful investigations show that already in 1914 "[m]any women were discontented with

their lives, a discontent which crystallised in concerted political agitation for the vote" (German 11-12). Middle and upper-class women were looking for a purpose in life other than staying at home. Main demands were the rights for higher education, suffrage and equal employment opportunities in the public sphere (German 13-14). Hence, before World War I, gender roles for women were as clear and strict as in Victorian times but with a rising awareness of women that there could be more to life than housekeeping and motherhood and with a few female exceptions who already broke with heteronormative expectations.

World War I completely changed living conditions and the requirements of British society.

Every aspect of women's lives changed too. Women won the vote. They strove for equal pay. Work changed for women, as did life in the home. There were fewer servants, more factory workers, more women doctors and teachers. Social and sexual attitudes altered. Skirts were worn shorter and hair was bobbed. (German 11)

The end of the war brought further development on the one hand, and a backward trend on the other hand. The negative effects were that "[t]he women who had played such a big part in war work were treated abominably even before its end. Many lost their jobs" (German 37). Furthermore, as a woman it became more difficult to marry as more men than women had died in the war (German 40). Nevertheless, other job opportunities in newly arising industries opened up for women and higher education became more easily accessible (German 39). "More work opportunities and changing social attitudes altered women's outlook. By the end of the war, women had modified their appearance and behaviour. They wore shorter skirts and cut their hair, were more likely to go out on their own" (German 33).

The Roaring Twenties brought even more change and freedom for women as well as a further advance into male domains: "the boyish 'jumper' became fashionable in 1922. Hair was bobbed and then severely shingled in the Eton crop of the mid-1920s. Trousers, however, were strictly for sport or for lounging on the beach" (Rowbotham 120). In contrast to the Victorian woman who kept still and remained in the house, preferably draped on the sofa, the ideal 1920s girl "was apparently always mobile; she danced, she gaggled from cocktail party

to club, she swam, she played tennis” (Rowbotham 120). Health and physical training were considered “as the key[s] to beauty” (Rowbotham 138). However, various “repressive attitudes [...] survived the glitter of the decade” (Rowbotham 145). “The moral was clear: stay still and be content” (Rowbotham 120) and housekeeping and motherhood were still regarded as crucial skills. As a consequence, women had to balance two contradicting demands: “to be vigorous and graceful at the same time” (Rowbotham 139).

Due to radicalisation and premonitions of World War II in the 1930s, “the overt demands for women’s emancipation in terms of political and economic change go into retreat” (Rowbotham 172). The “dramatic external events eclipsed the nuances of cultural change occurring in gender relations” (Rowbotham 173). Nevertheless, women of all three classes still had their own battles to fight. Working-class women campaigned, went on strike and marched against unemployment, poor working and living conditions as well as for equal wages, better working opportunities and social insurance (Rowbotham 180-184). Particularly middle-class women had to handle the question of “how to balance conflicting claims of work and children, or love and freedom” (Rowbotham 172) or, in other words, of how to balance traditional values and modern needs. For women in high society, “[i]t was still customary [...] to do the season, which, besides being presented at court, involved much flower-arranging and window-shopping” (Rowbotham 186). As exercise still remained important in the 1930s, lots of middle and upper-class women were “busily keeping fit in satin shorts” (Rowbotham 191). Politically committed women of the upper and middle-class also supported working-class women in their various fights and campaigned for the right to enter institutions of higher education. It became clear that Victorian values still operated and that women had to fight hard for more freedom.

An interesting development in gender questions was that male villains in films often had feminine vocations like being hairdressers or musicians. “This deviant masculinity of modern times disturbed reliance on the customary and the known” (Rowbotham 191). This disturbance can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, not only women’s roles changed but also the notion of masculinity underwent a progression of softening typical male gender conventions. On the other hand, showing feminine traits in male villains could

also be regarded as a device to present gender transgressions, also from men, as something abnormal which is located on the same low level as criminality.

In World War II, new duties and virtues arose for women but traditional values remained valid in the background to make a come-back after the war. The new virtues that were requested from women were courage, loyalty, teamwork, friendship and “a femininity in which personal inclination was subordinated to public duty” (Rowbotham 222). “It was a version of womanhood as heroic service and personal denial which was to live on in the post-war period and become a crucial linchpin of social cohesion” (Rowbotham 221). The ideal women advertised in newspaper comic strips were interested in airplanes, chose personal risks before marriage, served their country and hunted spies (Rowbotham 220). Again, as in World War I, women’s duty was to undertake abandoned jobs previously performed by men:

The protection and welfare of the state’s citizens on the home front was also essential to [the war’s] success. There was therefore a major role for women, especially in Britain and the United States, who took on work which had previously been done by men or entered new jobs for which a large workforce was needed. (German 43)

Politicians were probably against the employment of women in traditional male occupations but Britain needed women’s work force: “No other country conscripted women on the scale that Britain did, and that had a major impact on how women’s roles changed” (German 43). Therefore, “[t]he exceptional nature of wartime meant that women’s extraordinary actions were part of the suspension of normal life; they did not necessarily affect how women were regarded in the long term” (Rowbotham 229). This meant that women’s “position in the home had to be safeguarded” (Rowbotham 223) and “[w]hile the government was appealing to women to help the war effort it displayed a curious insouciance about how houses were to be cleaned and children cared for” (Rowbotham 234).

Enid Blyton, the author of *Five on a Treasure Island*, was born in 1897 (British Women Writers 69). She grew up in a time when Victorian values were still valid, survived both World Wars and experienced the continual change of gender conventions and roles for women. Her novel was published in 1942, during the Second World War. All this suggests that Enid Blyton is both guided

by traditional values and modern ideas. The dichotomy between the dependent wife and mother and the independent libertarian career woman that exists in mid-twentieth century's society is reflected in *Five on a Treasure Island*. While Anne belongs to the first category of women, George is the free spirit seeking independence and freedom rather than social adaptation. In the following, womanly traits will be presented by showing Anne's behaviour as well as George's disregard of gender roles.

Anne represents the traditional submissive woman. She adores her dolls: "Anne wanted to take all her fifteen dolls with her last year,' said Dick [...] 'I love my dolls, and I just couldn't choose which to take'" (Blyton 8). Contrasting George, who engages in any activity and does so on her own, "Anne didn't want to go alone. She was trying her best not to show that she was afraid of the storm. But it was more than she could do to go out of the cosy room into the rain and thunder by herself" (Blyton 41). Anne is not as ashamed to admit fear and weakness as George; she knows that she perfectly corresponds with what is expected of women. A last very womanly connoted trait is Anne's compassion with the injured Dick: "Anne took his hand. She was very upset at the little accident, and although she didn't want to miss the fun either, she meant to stay with Dick till he felt better" (Blyton 86). However, that Anne prefers to fit into the traditional role of a woman does not mean that she is meant to be a weak character. She makes her own decisions, which are not ridiculed but respected by the others.

As mentioned before, the new woman was supposed to exhibit courage, loyalty, teamwork, friendship, a willingness to choose personal risks before marriage, personal denial and unconditional service to the country. Until the end of *Five on a Treasure Island*, George corresponds with the first six of these characteristics. The first five traits can be easily found. The sixth, personal denial, can be observed when she foregoes her pocket money in order to keep Tim. We cannot say if she would also be willing to unconditionally serve her country. Nevertheless, our tomboy character George shows a remarkable similarity to the new woman. This is an unmistakable sign that gender conventions change and the line between male and female gender roles starts to blur even more than in the nineteenth century. In the following, it will be

discussed how George breaks with typical gender expectations by being assertive, a good leader, loving danger, rescuing others, refusing consumerism and being aggressive and confrontational.

Although women could be adventurous and brave, they were still expected to be submissive to males and authority. George is stubborn and not at all submissive: "I wouldn't have taken anyone to see my wreck, not even the Queen of England, if I didn't like them" (Blyton 25). When George does not like something, she makes that abundantly clear in a strong-willed way: "[Julian:] 'My goodness, how you do go up in smoke! Honestly, I believe anyone could light a cigarette from the sparks that fly from your eyes!'" (Blyton 31). As she is accustomed to independence and self-driven activity, she refuses guidance and advice by men at first. It requires careful diplomacy and considerable insight from Julian to weaken George's defence and appeal to her soft side. On the one hand, her recalcitrance makes George a gender-bending, rebellious character. On the other hand, she yields to Julian's good-natured and wise efforts to affect her and therefore confirms his superiority indirectly.

Leadership comes naturally to George, a skill completely ascribed to men, as women had to be submissive. George is the one who knows Kirrin and all its most exciting places and is most capable to row a boat. She is the one who leads and gives instructions which are followed by the boys and Anne (Blyton 52). In the first days, George knows everything and leads while Julian is pictured as a good-natured and tolerant boy. Subsequently, Julian assumes the role of the leader, is the one to make decisions, to undertake action and functions as adviser (Blyton 56, 58, 62, 67). However, George remains number two in the little group's hierarchy. Julian leads the treasure search, but exclusively asks George for her opinion. She is also the one who follows right behind (Blyton 72, 78). In the most dangerous situation, George takes over the decision making and acting again. She communicates with the villains, conducts a plan to warn Dick and Anne and when they finally manage to escape the island, she instructs the other three not to answer to an accomplice: "Don't answer,' said George. 'Don't say a word.' So no one said anything at all" (Blyton 104). This means that she possesses enough authority that her decisions are not questioned. It also reflects Blyton's moral that "co-operation is the highest

good” (British Women Writers 7). In the end, George and Julian together describe to the adults what happened on Kirrin Island after their adventure (Blyton 106).

Further characteristics separate George from the prevalent role of a woman, parallel her partly with the role of the new woman and sometimes situate her completely outside of prescribed female roles of her time. Her love for danger would be a quality of the new woman: “[y]ou can’t get up to it, though, because I’ve tried. I nearly broke my neck trying to get up” (Blyton 37). George’s willingness to risk her own life to save her dog, could also be seen as a characteristic of the new woman:

There was an old iron ladder fastened to the side of the well. George was on it before anyone else could get there! Down she went, not caring if the ladder held her or not, and reached Tim. Somehow she got him on to her shoulder and, holding him there with one hand, she climbed slowly up again. (Blyton 77)

In three other ways, George does not conform to either of the two female ideals. She does not support consumerism, which became an important leisure activity for middle-class women: “I don’t want nice things!’ cried poor George. ‘My castle and my island are the nicest things I could ever have” (Blyton 65). Furthermore, this one scene presents her high level of aggression:

George darted into the little stone room as they passed it, and caught up an axe. [...] George jumped into [the villain’s boat] and gave a yell of delight. [...] ‘I’ve got a job to do here! [...] all kinds of crashing sounds came from the motor-boat! ‘George! George! Buck up.’ [...] George leapt out of the motor-boat and joined the others. They pushed their boat out on to the water, and George took the oars at once, pulling for all she was worth. [...] George had completely ruined [the motor-boat]! (Blyton 103)

George’s reaction towards the villain’s following threat to harm her signifies her preparedness for confrontations: “‘You wicked girl!’ yelled Jake, shaking his fist at George. ‘Wait till I get you!’ ‘I’ll wait!’ shouted back George, her blue eyes shining dangerously” (Blyton 103). She is by no means intimidated by the villain but rather willing to take up a fight.

A last observation of how gender roles are presented in *Five on a Treasure Island*, deals with the gendered inequality of possibilities. According to Anne, it seems to be easier for girls to enjoy male connoted activities than vice versa: “I

do like pretty frocks. I love my dolls and you can't do that if you're a boy” (Blyton 15). With Anne's last statement, she strengthens the socially accepted gender boundaries by inferring that boys cannot do and like activities and things that girls like. George, on the other hand, transgresses gender roles permanently. She is even excelling in doing 'boys' stuff' or sports. She is a better diver and rower and Anne thinks of her as an even better swimmer than her brothers: “I'll never be as good as you but I'd like to be as good as the boys” (Blyton 32). This disparity in possibilities indicates that it is easier for girls to like 'boys' stuff' than for boys to enjoy 'girls' stuff,' a finding which parallels the study by Plumb and Cowan (710-11). They suggest that boys' activities and interests are more gender-neutral and regarded as less gender-violating than girls' activities and interests.

To summarize, George is not only a gender-bending tomboy according to recent studies but also in comparison to Anne and the prescribed roles for women in the first half of the twentieth century. She is strong, independent and willing to fight for herself and those she loves. Although George undergoes a remarkable character development, from recluse to team-player, and her edges soften, she manages to retain enough aggressive energy to demolish a motorboat; and although she agrees to enter boarding school, she is stubborn enough to insist on being called George. Like Jo, George behaves in a gender-flexible, norm-flexible and deviant way. She breaks with gender conventions and general social norms even more than Jo. Her tomboy character signifies that society evolves towards modernity and social change.

## 5. *The Hunger Games*

*The Hunger Games* is the first part of an adventure trilogy for young adults which “has become an international phenomenon” (Taber, Woloshyn and Lane 1022). Written by Suzanne Collins and published in 2008, it is the most recent novel this thesis investigates. It pictures a dystopian version of North America after an apocalyptic event that destroyed society as we know it today. Due to scarce and dangerous living conditions, 13 districts, ruled by a Capitol, have been established. Rising inequality and discontent within the districts have led to a rebellion against the Capitol but it was defeated. Since that time, the Hunger Games, for which every district has to provide two tributes, have taken place once a year. The tributes, a boy and a girl each, have to enter into a battle for survival which only one tribute can win. In the first novel, Katniss, who lives in one of the poorest districts, volunteers to enter the Games instead of her sister. Together with the male tribute of her district, Peeta, she not only struggles to survive the Hunger Games but also to remain herself despite dire circumstances and the Capitol’s pressure.

This thesis’ aim is to present how gender roles and with them the term tomboy have developed within the last 150 years. So far, it was possible to identify significant changes in the notion of the tomboy from *Little Women* to *Five on a Treasure Island*. As a twenty-first century novel, *The Hunger Games* introduces a completely new tomboy figure which might not be a tomboy at all. The current century has brought especially strong developments of gender roles. *The Hunger Games’* plotline reflects those developments. It sends “mixed messages with respect to gendered stereotypes” (Taber, Woloshyn and Lane 1022) by “present[ing] and challeng[ing] various forms of masculinity and femininity” (Taber, Woloshyn and Lane 1022). Therefore, it is not as easily possible to distinguish between typically boyish and girlish activities in the novel. Although readers might think of Katniss as someone who acts like a boy or man, society in the novel does not distinguish male and female behaviour into stereotypical roles with strict boundaries. For example, both women and men work in the mines and both women and men are stylists on the prep teams. The strongest indicator that *The Hunger Games’* society might have reached gender equality is that they send both genders into the Hunger Games to fight each other. The

only argument for gender inequality could be that all leaders are male: the mayor in district twelve, president Snow and the Gamemaker Templesmith. However, the sequels to the trilogy's first novel introduce strong female leaders as well. Furthermore, it is the girl Katniss who is able to challenge injustice and the system, not a boy.

If we continued as before by measuring what is considered as boyish by other characters and society within the novel, we would quickly come to the conclusion that Katniss is no tomboy. There are no examples in the book that suggest that Katniss' behaviour is regarded as boyish or manly or especially gender flexible because traditionally male or female connoted characteristics are treated in a gender neutral way. As a consequence, characteristics that are not gendered, by the novel's society, cannot be considered as tomboyish. Furthermore, Katniss does not express the wish to be a man like Jo and George did. Therefore, the first three subsections, General Observations, Analysis Grid and Working Hypotheses, have to handle Katniss as a gender neutral heroine instead of a tomboy. Due to this gender neutrality, some tomboy categories cannot be discussed at all. Quotes will be examined that rather represent Katniss' exceptional personality but barely fulfil the requirements of the tomboy characterisation grid. This should provide a contrast to the tomboy characters so far and should strengthen the assumption that the term tomboy is close to being rendered obsolete in today's society.

The reader of this thesis might wonder why some of Katniss' activities and qualities are not regarded as girlish or typically female. Many readers might define Katniss as a tomboy. Nevertheless, she does not meet the established tomboy requirements because her environment in the novel does not offer gender norms for such a categorization. The tomboy term, which is solely defined by gender-boundaries and their transgressions, becomes redundant when those gendered differences disappear. However, the second part of this section, the Historical Perspective, will exemplify that Katniss is both, a tomboy and not a tomboy. The comparison with today's gender norms will show that it depends on the gender approach of the reader, whether Katniss is a tomboy or not.

A second approach which will be taken during the analysis of *The Hunger Games* is to present contrasting female characters like Prim, Katniss' sister, Effie, Katniss' supervisor, Rue, another female tribute, and Katniss' mother. By examining these characters, Katniss will not be singled out as an exception like it was done with the tomboys in the previous two novels. The aim is to rather exemplify that *The Hunger Games* features more than just two kinds of female roles. Other than in the two novels before, several types of female characters with different weaknesses and strengths can be found. For the first time, it is possible to encounter well rounded rather than idealised characters. In this context, Peeta's role is highly interesting, too. He is not pictured as a typical, physically strong, superior, male character but shows vulnerability as well as mental and physical strength, and intelligence. Like Katniss, he is a very complex character and individualized; and like Katniss, he reveals qualities traditionally associated with male as well as female characteristics. This suggests that *The Hunger Games* pictures a highly gender-neutral society.

## **5.1. Analysis**

### **5.1.1. General Observations**

One main difference between *The Hunger Games* and the other two novels that were investigated is that it is told from Katniss' perspective. Due to the use of a homodiegetic narrator, the reader receives information about actions and other characters' reactions solely through Katniss. On some occasions, it cannot be taken for granted that Katniss' interpretations mirror the actual feelings and thoughts of other characters; especially when she explicitly tries to figure out the intentions of others. Quotes which are unreliable for this reason will be either omitted or their ambiguity will be commented on. An advantage of the 'narrating I' is that the reader receives more insight into Katniss' character and that the main focus lies on her throughout the whole book.

As stated in the introduction to this section, it cannot be as easily determined as in the previous novels whether Katniss is a tomboy or not. It seems that *The Hunger Games* and its main protagonist Katniss require a whole new mind set about tomboys. Nevertheless, the analysis will follow the same schema as with

the two novels before. In this section, the first impression the reader gains of Katniss as well as her contradictory qualities and contrasts between her and other characters will be discussed. However, it is not possible to explicitly determine whether Katniss is to be regarded as a tomboy character, nor to find masculine connotations, nor to detect male associated language use by Katniss, nor to apply a male semantic field, like we found with terms such as “marching” and “Sancho” in *Little Women* or with “Master” and “old boy” in *Five on a Treasure Island*.

The first impression the reader gains of Katniss is her reflection about how she wanted to drown a kitten: “I tried to drown him in a bucket when Prim brought him home. Scrawny kitten, belly swollen with worms, crawling with fleas. The last thing I needed was another mouth to feed” (Collins 4). This recollection immediately reveals Katniss as a practical, cool-headed person and responsible breadwinner rather than a sentimental girl. It furthermore discloses her willingness to kill if it is necessary to guarantee her and her family’s survival. The next quotes from the beginning of the novel picture her as athletic, independent and agile:

I swing my legs off the bed and slide into my hunting boots. Supple leather that has molded to my feet. I pull on trousers, a shirt, tuck my long dark braid up into a cap, and grab my forage bag. (Collins 4)

I flatten out on my belly and slide under a two-foot stretch that’s been loose for years. (Collins 5)

As soon as I’m in the trees, I retrieve a bow and sheath of arrows from a hollow log. (Collins 5)

These lines create the impression of a confident person and experienced hunter. She is furthermore in control of her emotions and reactions: “I learned to hold my tongue and to turn my features into an indifferent mask so that no one could ever read my thoughts. [...] Even at home, where I am less pleasant, I avoid discussing tricky topics” (Collins 7). Her absolute self-control is confirmed by her hunting partner and confidant: “Gale says I never smile except in the woods” (Collins 7).

These first impressions also present vocabulary, like “hunting,” “forage bag” and “bow and sheath of arrows,” which might strike most readers as traditionally

male-connoted. However, in the novel's society, which serves as the base of analysis in sections 5.1.1., 5.1.2. and 5.1.3., these words are not gendered. Therefore, they are handled as gender-neutral in this part of the thesis' analysis, too. In the historical analysis in section 5.2., more traditional perceptions of gender of today's society will be discussed in regard to *The Hunger Games*.

The reader learns Katniss' name comparatively late, on page five. She is named after the plant 'Katniss,' which has "leaves like arrowheads" (Collins 60) and is called arrowhead as well, a hint at her abilities as an archer. Gale calls her 'Catnip' which might be a reference to her beauty as it means "[s]omeone or something that is very attractive or appealing" (Oxford Dictionaries 2016). Concerning her appearance, she compares herself to Gale. Both have "[s]traight black hair, olive skin, [they] even have the same gray eyes" (Collins 9). Next to her self-control and skills as an archer, the line "I'm not the forgiving type" (Collins 9) foreshadows her as a serious future competitor in the Hunger Games.

Katniss is a contradictory character. In the previous paragraph, her coolness and controlled temper is described but later on she will also act in a mean-spirited and impulsive manner. On the one hand, she is pictured as a practical, deadly hunter; on the other hand, she will be presented as a giggling harmless girl and a romantic lover. However, in private, a third side of Katniss reveals her bad temper in situations where she is overwhelmed. She acts like a diva when she is put under undue pressure; she shoves Peeta to the ground (Collins 156-7) and throws dishes (Collins 137). These observations not only prove her character's complexity but highlight the fact that she tries to hide her real potential, strength and nature but also temperament in order to survive the Capitol's games.

Prim offers the most distinct contrast to Katniss. She is the defenceless younger sister that needs to be protected by Katniss. When Katniss remembers her motivation to make their home appear functional in order to prevent Prim from being put into a community home, she thinks: "I could never let that happen to Prim. Sweet, tiny Prim who cried when I cried before she even knew the reason, who brushed and plaited my mother's hair before we left for school, who still polished my father's shaving mirror each night" (Collins 32). Prim is described

as emotional, warm and situated at home, where she cares for their mother and keeps the memory of their father alive, while Katniss is outside, hunting and feeding the family. Their contrasting roles are highlighted when Katniss remembers her attempt to teach Prim how to hunt:

I tried to teach her a couple of times and it was disastrous. The woods terrified her, and whenever I shot something, she'd get teary and talk about how we might be able to heal it if we got it home soon enough. But she makes out well with her goat. (Collins 40)

Prim is afraid to be outside the protective fence, she is genuinely fond of healing but detests killing and she is good at nurturing and producing agricultural products. While Katniss is “not the forgiving type,” as stated before, Prim is the more optimistic, docile type. This is exemplified by the sisters’ contrary reactions to their recovering mother: “Prim was thrilled to have [our mother] back [...] I didn’t trust her. And some small gnarled place inside me hated her for her weakness, for her neglect, for the months she had put us through. Prim forgave her” (Collins 60). All of Prim’s characteristics stand in sharp contrast to Katniss’. This impression is strengthened by Katniss’ reflection on the different reactions the sisters elicit: “[p]eople deal with me, but they are genuinely fond of Prim” (Collins 43).

A female character that combines characteristics of both sisters is Rue. She is used to being outdoors and surviving in nature. She is brave in the arena and a stronger competitor than it first appears. When Katniss and Rue discuss their plan to outwit the career tributes, Rue’s reaction is contrary to how Prim would react: “You can see the glint of excitement in [Rue’s] eyes. In this way, she’s exactly the opposite of Prim, for whom adventures are an ordeal” (Collins 246). Then again, Rue is able to heal and nurture, she is not used to using weapons and her appearance and conduct strongly resemble Prim.

With Rue, *The Hunger Games* is the first of our three novels to provide an alternative character next to the tomboy and the traditional woman. Additionally, the novel features two more female characters who offer an even wider variety of identities: Katniss’ mother and Effie. Katniss’ mother seems to be a strong woman who chose love over wealth and financial security. However, when her husband dies, she breaks down completely, leaving her children unprotected and unprovided for. She becomes weak and needs Katniss to survive. On the

other hand, Katniss' mother evinces strength, composure and empathy when treating patients. Her emotional sensitivity is both her strength and her weakness. Effie is a quite contrasting character, too. She appears to be a superficial, shallow and foolish woman who only cares about herself. However, she is also capable of empathy and kindness. She is able to develop a relationship to the two tributes despite her upbringing in the Capitol that taught her to think of Katniss and Peeta as primitive, inferior people. The importance she puts on pretences masks her personality, making it difficult to determine what she really feels. Next to Katniss, these other four female characters provide a miscellaneous array of female behaviours.

### 5.1.2. Analysis Grid

Out of the eight tomboy characteristics from the analysis grid, Katniss meets only two: a preference for the outdoors, sports and action as well as having male playmates – or in this case hunting mates. Her apparel is ambiguous and does not show whether she prefers to appear in masculine clothes. However, it will be discussed in order to show her variability. Categories that cannot be discussed due to a lack of data are: masculine behaviour, gender identity, doing 'boys' and girls' stuff,' doing 'boys' stuff' and gender flexibility. In the previous novels, these five categories were analysed based on other characters' reactions and judgements as well as self-reflections of the tomboys themselves. As not a single character in *The Hunger Games* classifies any activity or conduct as boyish, masculine or tomboyish, these categories cannot be applied. Without gender-stereotypical values, the term tomboy becomes obsolete as it is always measured against gender-norms for male or boyish behaviour. Although it is already established that Katniss does not meet the hypothesis that every protagonist will at least meet four out of the eight tomboy characteristics, the remaining three categories will be investigated.

Katniss does not seem to lay much emphasis on her apparel. On the one hand, she shows few signs of vanity and expresses no wish to either look boyish or girlish. Her usual clothes and hairstyle solely serve practical purposes:

I slept in the elaborate braided hair my mother did for the reaping and it doesn't look too bad, so I just leave it up. It doesn't matter. (Collins 63)

This is the first time since the morning of the reaping that I resemble myself. No fancy hair and clothes, no flaming capes. Just me. Looking like I could be headed for the woods. It calms me. (Collins 100)

On the other hand, she is aware of and surprised by her appearance when she dresses for the reaping: “I can hardly recognize myself in the cracked mirror that leans against the wall. ‘You look beautiful,’ says Prim in a hushed voice. ‘And nothing like myself,’ I say” (Collins 17). She even reveals limited knowledge about make-up when the prep team works on her and when she describes Cinna’s appearance. Her new look seems to give her confidence: “I am not pretty. I am not beautiful. I am as radiant as the sun. For a while, we all just stare at me. ‘Oh Cinna,’ I finally whisper. ‘Thank you’” (Collins 140).

Katniss’ changing apparel serves as a symbol of the role she is playing. For the Capitol, she is disguised, her appearance is manipulated and she becomes someone else. She thinks and says several times that she does not feel like herself when she is dressed up. This feeling reflects her struggles of dealing with publicity and the superficiality in the Capitol, where she is lost in its jungle of glitter and pretence. When she enters the Games in practical clothes, she is able to regain her calmness and focuses on who she is and what she is capable of. After the Games and the final interview, she becomes herself again by changing into simple clothes: “I excuse myself to change out of my dress and into a plain shirt and pants. As I slowly, thoroughly wash the makeup from my face and put my hair in its braid, I begin transforming back into myself” (Collins 432). It cannot be said that Katniss meets the tomboy characteristic of dressing like a boy or wishing to look like a boy. Apparel is more an indicator of her identity and individuality. It does not fulfil a gendered category but mirrors her genuine personality and character.

The first tomboy criterion Katniss fulfils is having male companions. Her closest friend and confidant is Gale. At the beginning of the book, Gale and Katniss are very often mentioned together such as in “both of us hunting daily” (Collins 11). Lots of Katniss’ memories recount experiences with Gale, which creates the impression that they belong together like an inextricable entity. Other than with Gale, Katniss is reserved with others and prefers being alone. A friend with whom she shares these qualities is Madge:

Being the mayor's daughter, you'd expect her to be a snob, but she's all right. She just keeps to herself. Like me. Since neither of us really has a group of friends, we seem to end up together a lot at school. Eating lunch, sitting next to each other at assemblies, partnering for sports activities. We rarely talk, which suits us both just fine. (Collins 13)

Katniss has friends of both genders and does not care about their genders. It is implied that she bonds over personal traits like a preference for solitude and silence or the burden of being responsible to feed a whole family.

The second and last tomboy category Katniss meets is a preference of action, outdoors and sports. However, in her case, the phrase 'a preference of action' is not the right phrasing. She does not seek adventures like Jo or George; it is rather her environment itself that keeps pushing her into hazardous situations. Her personality leads her to be aware of danger, accept it and make the best of the situation. These quotes exemplify her attitude towards danger:

Even though trespassing in the woods is illegal and poaching carries the severest of penalties, more people would risk it if they had weapons. (Collins 6)

We have to joke about it because the alternative is to be scared out of your wits. (Collins 9)

Anyway, Gale and I agree that if we have to choose between dying of hunger and a bullet in the head, the bullet would be much quicker. (Collins 19)

It was frightening to enter [the Hob] without my father at my side, but people had respected him, and they accepted me. (Collins 59)

Katniss prefers taking dangerous actions over being passive and starving to death. That she enters the Hunger Games as a tribute is also caused by her instinctive need to protect her sister, not by her fancy for adventure.

Katniss does not only prefer the outdoors but flourishes in nature. It seems to be one of the few things that calm her down. In order to maintain her cool in various situations, she looks at trees or thinks about the forest. Her closeness to nature can be observed in the following lines:

From this place, we are invisible but have a clear view of the valley, which is teeming with summer life, greens to gather, roots to dig, fish iridescent in the sunlight. (Collins 10)

The woods became our savior, and each day I went a bit farther into its arms. (Collins 58)

Being in the woods is rejuvenating. (Collins 177)

Like in the discussion of Katniss' apparel, nature seems to allow Katniss to be herself. The woods are the only place where she feels free and at ease. For Katniss, the outdoors is not a place to prove herself or to live out exuberant energies like it is for Jo and George; it is a "savior" that keeps her and her family alive and it allows her to secretly share her critical thoughts of the system with Gale.

The third subcategory of this tomboy characteristic – sports – also needs to be rephrased to suit Katniss. In her case, sports denote her skills in throwing knives, hunting with bow and arrow and climbing trees:

I yank the knife out of the table, get a grip on the blade, and then throw it into the wall across the room. (Collins 66)

'Katniss, it's just hunting. You're the best hunter I know,' says Gale. (Collins 45)

'She's excellent,' says Peeta. 'My father buys her squirrels. He always comments on how the arrows never pierce the body. She hits every one in the eye. It's the same with the rabbits she sells the butcher. She can even bring down deer.' (Collins 103)

Gale always says I remind him of a squirrel the way I can scurry up even the slenderest limbs. (Collins 213)

In *The Hunger Games*, very few people are able to enjoy the luxury of practicing sports. In poor districts, like district 11 and 12, where people mainly try to survive, sports are not affordable. Therefore, everyone who is able to hunt would do so regardless of their gender.

All these subcategories of the tomboy characteristic 'preference of outdoors, sports and action' are not gendered in *The Hunger Games*. While they were associated with masculine connoted activities in the studies provided at the beginning and in the previous two novels, they are completely gender-neutral in the novel at hand. Girls as well as boys survive in nature. Examples like Gale, Rue and Thresh show that an affinity to nature is not bound to gender. The fact that girls as well as boys are trained and proficient in the use of weapons and fighting highlights gender-equality, too. Both girls and boys act independently

rather than remaining passive. Hence, although Katniss fulfils this tomboy characteristic, it does not mean the same as in *Little Women* and *Five on a Treasure Island*. In *The Hunger Games*, being athletic assures survival and enables freedom rather than signifying defiance and gender-transgression. In *The Hunger Games*, it means a gender-overlapping will to survive.

### 5.1.3. Working Hypotheses

As mentioned before, Katniss only meets two of the eight defining characteristics for tomboys; and the two that apply to her still do not define her as a tomboy as they are fulfilled in a completely gender-neutral setting. The working definition, which claims that tomboys behave in a way that is considered masculine or boyish by other characters, is not met either. It is not possible to apply a tomboy definition and defining criteria that depend on comparisons between gender-conforming and gender-transgressive behaviours to a society that neither distinguishes between the two genders nor defines gender-stereotypical behaviour. It can now be unambiguously stated that Katniss is no tomboy, if we apply the criteria of contemporary studies and in comparison to Jo and George. Although these first two hypotheses are not met, we will nevertheless look into the three remaining hypotheses. Furthermore, other characters' reactions towards her as well as her character development will be investigated to reveal more about Katniss' personality and motivation. The aim of doing so is to further develop a basis on which it is possible to compare the three protagonists of all three novels. This comparison should yield significant and valuable results to support the premise of this thesis that gender norms develop towards a stage where they are no longer important. Today's society has not reached complete gender-equality yet and might never reach it. However, modern perceptions of gender render the term tomboy redundant.

The third hypothesis suggests that a family crisis, especially the loss of the father, increases tomboyish behaviour. Although Katniss cannot be regarded as a classic tomboy, the death of her father does influence her considerably. Luckily for the three women, her father taught Katniss how to hunt and move in the woods: "My father knew and he taught me some before he was blown to bits in a mine explosion. There was nothing even to bury. I was eleven then. Five

years later, I still wake up screaming for him to run” (Collins 5-6). While Katniss’ father is a positive and very present figure in the first half of the book, Katniss’ mother is pictured as weak and a liability. It is not her who protects and feeds her children but the oldest daughter, Katniss, who has to be strong for the family:

I was terrified. I suppose now that my mother was locked in some dark world of sadness, but at the time, all I knew was that I had lost not only a father, but a mother as well. At eleven years old, with Prim just seven, I took over as head of the family. There was no choice. (Collins 31)

The family’s desperate situation forced Katniss to act, to be brave and to function independently: “finally I worked up the courage to go under the fence. It was the first time I’d been there alone, without my father’s weapons to protect me” (Collins 58). “I was determined to feed us. [...] I kept us alive” (Collins 59). Katniss’ exceptionally strong, enduring personality is obviously formed by this crisis. This experience prepared her to be able to win the Hunger Games.

Katniss’ concern for her younger sister forces her to become a good hunter and a more efficient, flexible and proficient breadwinner. Next to her father’s death, Prim is the main reason that Katniss becomes such a physically and mentally strong character and takes over the duties as the head of the family. Katniss’ sisterly instinct is highlighted from the very beginning:

I hug her, because I know these next few hours will be terrible for her. Her first reaping. She’s about as safe as you can get, since she’s only entered once. I wouldn’t let her take out any tesserae. But she’s worried about me. (Collins 17)

I protect Prim in every way I can, but I’m powerless against the reaping. The anguish I always feel when she’s in pain wells up in my chest and threatens to register on my face. (Collins 17-18)

Katniss’ love for Prim culminates in her taking Prim’s place as a tribute:

It was as if the impact had knocked every wisp of air from my lungs, and I lay there struggling to inhale, to exhale, to do anything. That’s how I feel now, trying to remember how to breathe, unable to speak, totally stunned as the name bounces around the inside of my skull. (Collins 24)

I reach [Prim] just as she is about to mount the steps. With one sweep of my arm, I push her behind me. ‘I volunteer!’ I gasp. ‘I volunteer as a tribute!’ (Collins 25)

Usually, it is the parents' function to protect their children. In Katniss' case, her mother would not have been allowed to intervene. Moreover, from the moment of her father's death, Katniss performs the role of a parent, provider and protector for Prim. It is therefore easily observable that the father's loss caused her development into such a strong person. It cannot be said that it increased her tomboyish behaviour or turned her into a tomboy as she does not meet the established tomboy requirements. Nevertheless, it will be shown in the following that the early responsibility for her younger sister shaped Katniss into an exceptional, wary, and physically and mentally strong character. Next to these positively connoted characteristics, the examples will also show that Katniss is not a flawless modern heroine. There are many situations where she is overwhelmed, clueless, and more emotional and impulsive than calculating and composed. Especially in the Capitol's world of pretence and superficiality, Katniss seldom reacts in the calm and controlled manner the reader knows her to adopt in district 12.

By far the most exceptional of Katniss' actions is her volunteering for Prim as a tribute. It does not only strike the reader as exceptional behaviour but also her society. Usually, "[f]amily devotion only goes so far for most people on reaping day. What I did was the radical thing" (Collins 30). The impact of Katniss' sacrifice is shown by the reaction of district 12:

But a shift has occurred since I stepped up to take Prim's place, and now it seems I have become someone precious. At first one, then another, then almost every member of the crowd touches the three middle fingers of their left hand to their lips and holds it out to me. It is an old and rarely used gesture of our district, occasionally seen at funerals. It means thanks, it means admiration, it means good-bye to someone you love. (Collins 28)

Not only does her district demonstrate respect for Katniss, it is simultaneously a last good-bye for one of them who is most probably going to die a cruel death in the arena. A second situation that exemplifies what an extraordinary character Katniss is, is when she buries Rue in flowers to display her state as a human being rather than an object of the Capitol's will:

I want to do something, right here, right now, to shame them, to make them accountable, to show the Capitol that whatever they do or force us to do there is a part of every tribute they can't own. That Rue was more than a piece in their Game. (Collins 276)

Although the districts are powerless and at the Capitol's mercy, Katniss finds her personal way of rebellion. The third situation of exceptional behaviour, another slap in the Capitol's face, is when she decides to eat the poisonous berries with Peeta at the end of the Hunger Games. Katniss knows that the Capitol needs a victor for their Games. By threatening to poison both remaining tributes, Peeta and herself, she deliberately forces her will onto the Capitol. She learned from the death of her father not to give in easily and to try or die fighting. Those traits become obvious in her resistance against the Capitol.

From the moment Katniss becomes a tribute, she is very careful about her reactions and tries to calculate every move. She thinks strategically and is wary of her situation. She is aware that everything she does and says is filmed and could be broadcast:

'Prim, let go,' I say harshly, because this is upsetting me and I don't want to cry. When they televise the replay of the reappings tonight, everyone will make note of my tears, and I'll be marked as an easy target. A weakling. I will give no one that satisfaction. 'Let go!' (Collins 26)

I cannot afford to get upset, to leave this room with puffy eyes and a red nose. Crying is not an option. (Collins 39)

Katniss knows that the time before the Games is already part of her battle to survive. She needs to appear strong to attract sponsors and intimidate the other tributes. Therefore, she is even willing to act as if being in love with Peeta. In this case, her pretence is not only aimed at the audience but also at Peeta. Initially, in her eyes, he is one of 23 tributes whom she needs to outlive:

Peeta takes off his jacket and wraps it around my shoulders. I start to take a step back, but then I let him, deciding for a moment to accept both his jacket and his kindness. A friend would do that, right? (Collins 95)

After winning the Hunger Games together with Peeta, she still has to tread carefully. Her threat to poison both of them was an open rebellion in the eyes of the Capitol, which makes Katniss a target for its revenge. Haymitch suggests to Katniss to continue acting as if she were in love with Peeta: "[y]our only defense can be you were so madly in love you weren't responsible for your actions" (Collins 417). This is what Katniss does in a calculating way in order to protect her family.

Due to her challenging family background, Katniss has become physically and mentally strong: “[I]t isn’t in my nature to go down without a fight, even when things seem insurmountable” (Collins 42). As soon as she is able to obtain bow and arrow, Katniss’ combativeness awakens: “I know I have tough opponents left to face. But I am no longer merely prey that runs and hides or takes desperate measures” (Collins 231). To Rue she states: “‘We’re strong, too,’ I say. ‘Just in a different way’” (Collins 241). Katniss’ mental strength is exemplified in two ways. First, in her reluctance to lie: “‘I’m not good at lying,’ I say” (Collins 136); second, in her attempt to save Peeta’s life despite her aversion to healing processes: “I want to run away. [...] Go and hunt while my mother and Prim attend to what I have neither the skill nor the courage to face” (Collins 276). Katniss shows that there are different ways to be courageous. For some, it is brave to go and fight, for others it is brave to face and treat lesions. Young adult fiction author Meg Cabot states “[c]ourage is not the absence of fear but rather the judgement that something is more important than fear,” a statement that is reflected in the morale of *The Hunger Games*, too. Collins does not only show one kind of courage but different ways to be brave, which is another good example for the novel’s complexity and variety.

The weaknesses Katniss displays serve to make her a complex, realistic and believable character and indicate her limits of endurance. She can be bad-tempered, exasperated, impulsive and stubborn. When Effie complains about the unpleasant table manners of the previous tributes from district 12, Katniss reacts in a stubborn, impulsive way on principle: “I hate Effie Trinket’s comment so much I make a point of eating the rest of my meal with my fingers” (Collins 52). The following examples picture Katniss as impulsive, aggressive and emotional:

Suddenly I am furious, that with my life on the line, they don’t even have the decency to pay attention to me. That I’m being upstaged by a dead pig. (Collins 117)

As I stride toward the elevator, I fling my bow to one side and my quiver to the other. I brush past the gaping Avoxes who guard the elevators and hit the number twelve button with my fist. (Collins 119)

I fly down the hall into my room, bolt the door, and fling myself onto my bed. Then I really begin to sob. (Collins 119)

The longer the interview goes on, the more my fury seems to rise to the surface, until I'm literally spitting out answers at him. (Collins 136)

It makes Katniss human to have nervous outbreaks in difficult situations. However, Peeta has even less chance of survival and yet does not behave in as bad-tempered and aggressive a way as Katniss. In this regard, he can be seen as a stronger, more selfless personality than her. Alternatively, it pictures him as less fiery than Katniss and highlights his unconditional love for her: It seems that he devotes all of his energy to support Katniss.

This thesis' fourth hypothesis about tomboys is that they are more tolerant towards outsiders and out-groups. For Katniss, this is true insofar as she allies with Rue and feels more positive towards Foxface and Thresh, who are underdogs, and does not want to ally herself with the career tributes. She is an out-group member herself, coming from one of the poorest districts. As such, she rather sympathises with other outsiders. However, this does not stop her from revealing strongly negative feelings towards Haymitch: "I realize I detest Haymitch" (Collins 64). Her reactions towards Capitol members are neither tolerant nor sympathetic as well:

I step away from the window, sickened by [the Capitol's inhabitants'] excitement, knowing they can't wait to watch us die. (Collins 68)

[D]espite my disgust with the Capitol and their hideous fashions, I can't help thinking how attractive it looks. (Collins 73)

He's right, though. The whole rotten lot of them is despicable. (Collins 75)

The opinion Katniss has of the Capitol is poor. However, towards Effie and the prep team, whom she gets to know better, she develops a more understanding and lenient perspective:

I try and imagine, for a moment, what it must be like inside that woman's head. What thoughts fill [Effie's] waking hours? What dreams come to her at night? I have no idea. (Collins 62)

Although lacking in many departments, Effie Trinket has a certain determination I have to admire. (Collins 86)

It's hard to hate my prep team. They're such total idiots. And yet, in an odd way, I know they're sincerely trying to help me. (Collins 72)

It's more in the way one might be glad to see an affectionate trio of pets at the end of a particularly difficult day. (Collins 412)

While Katniss' sole feeling for the Capitol is understandable hatred, her reactions towards Effie and the prep team are more complex. Her judgment is not just black and white but comprised of many layers. Katniss recognises Effie and the prep team's nice gestures and efforts.

All in all, it cannot be said that Katniss is especially tolerant towards others and it is obvious that she rather identifies with poor and suppressed people than with powerful, superior ones. She is also very intolerant of her mother's weakness and her failure to perform her natural role as protector and provider for her two daughters. Concerning gender violations or transgressions, *The Hunger Games* offers no examples, which is again based on the fact that it seems to picture a quite gender neutral society. Therefore, it cannot be said how Katniss would react towards gender deviation.

During the first half of the novel, Katniss regards men in a purely unromantic manner, as hunting or trading partners, confidants, doomed tributes or dangerous opponents. While sixteen-year-old Katniss shows no interest in dating and boys in general, other girls at her age do (Collins 11). It can be argued that her lack of interest in romantic relationships stems from the burden of providing for her family. Arguably, all her energy and focus go into feeding them and she is too distracted to think about love. Other reasons might be that she does not want to leave her family for a partner or that she does not want to have a family of her own because she knows what would happen to her children at the reaping and in the Hunger Games. Whatever her reasons are, it is clear that she is not interested in dating and relationships at the beginning. As such, she behaves similarly to Jo, who is also not interested in men. Although Katniss does not fall into this thesis' established definition of a tomboy, she fulfils the current hypothesis of being more tolerant towards outsiders and out-groups.

Katniss' relationship to Gale seems purely platonic but is soon revealed as more complex. At the beginning, her reaction to Gale's popularity with girls is completely practical: "It makes me jealous but not for the reason people would think. Good hunting partners are hard to find" (Collins 11). Moreover, she explicitly states that "[t]here's never been anything romantic between Gale and me" (Collins 11). However, after she volunteers as a tribute, she seeks Gale's support and closeness:

Finally, Gale is here and maybe there is nothing romantic between us, but when he opens his arms I don't hesitate to go into them. His body is familiar to me [...] but this is the first time I really feel it, lean and hard-muscled against my own. (Collins 44)

She seems to have changed her mind about Gale within a couple of days as she says "maybe there is nothing romantic between us" instead of being certain that "there is nothing romantic between us" or that "[t]here's never been anything romantic." Furthermore, Katniss is aware of Gale's body when she is in his arms. This might be a first sign of her awakening romantic feelings for another person. Another possible sign is provided by her strong reaction when she thinks about Gale shortly before the Games start: "I call him friend, but in the last year it's seemed too casual a word for what Gale is to me. A pang of longing shoots through my chest. If only he was with me now!" (Collins 129). On the one hand, her longing for him could solely be a sign for missing a close friend. On the other hand, it could be read as a sensual reaction.

Katniss' experiences with Peeta finally indicate her growing awareness of intimate feelings:

and suddenly, I'm not thinking of Gale but of Peeta. (Collins 230)

And then [Peeta] gives me a smile that seems so genuinely sweet with just the right touch of shyness that unexpected warmth rushes through me. (Collins 83)

a tiny part of me wonders if this was a compliment. That he meant I was appealing in some way. (Collins 107)

This is the first kiss where I actually feel stirring inside my chest. Warm and curious. This is the first kiss that makes me want another. (Collins 350)

Since my father died and I stopped trusting my mother, no one else's arms have made me feel this safe. (Collins 351)

Her thoughts about Peeta signal a growing attraction and attachment towards him. His looks and compliments confuse her in a positive way and she starts feeling safe with him.

However Katniss' feelings towards Gale or Peeta might have started out, she still refutes the traditional life of a woman that leads to giving birth to and raising children: "I'm never going to get married anyway [...] if I do have feelings for

him, it doesn't matter because I'll never be able to afford the kind of love that leads to a family, to children" (Collins 435). Katniss deliberately decides against most women's urges to start a family. Her decision is based on the knowledge that her children would be at risk to participate in the Hunger Games. Nevertheless, at the end of the trilogy, Katniss changes her mind and settles for marriage and children. Like Jo, stubborn and independent Katniss chooses a faithful and reliable partner. With Peeta she can process joint traumatic experiences and come to terms with their tragic personal history.

Katniss provokes strong reactions in others, which are mostly positive. Especially Prim, Rue and Peeta express solely favourable feelings towards her. Prim firmly believes in Katniss: "You're so fast and brave. Maybe you can win" (Collins 41); while "Rue has decided to trust me wholeheartedly" (Collins 243), an expression of absolute and deep trust as both are tributes in the Hunger Games and meant to kill each other. Peeta not only unconditionally loves Katniss; he also estimates her impact on others as highly positive:

'People will help you in the arena. They'll be tripping over each other to sponsor you.' 'No more than you,' I say. Peeta rolls his eyes at Haymitch. 'She has no idea. The effect she can have.' (Collins 105)

'a lot of boys like her' (Collins 151)

This does not only indicate that Katniss is regarded as an interesting and attractive personality by other characters, it also shows that she has no idea about her impact on others.

Haymitch is first impressed by Katniss' courage: "I like her! [...] 'Lots of...' He can't think of the word for a while. 'Spunk!' he says triumphantly" (Collins 28); and Peeta's and her willingness to go down fighting: "Well, what's this?" says Haymitch. 'Did I actually get a pair of fighters this year?'" (Collins 65). On the other hand, he criticizes her bad temper and moods:

'Just remember, Katniss, you want the audience to like you.' 'And you don't think they will?' 'Not if you glare at them the entire time. Why don't you save that for the arena?' (Collins 134)

'Whereas when you open your mouth, you come across more as sullen and hostile.' 'I do not!' I say. 'Please, I don't know where you pulled that cheery, wavy girl on the chariot from, but I haven't seen her before or since.' (Collins 135)

Despite these harsh words, Haymitch's and Katniss' wordless communication in the arena indicates that they understand each other quite well. Their strange relationship is addressed occasionally, indicating that they might have very similar characters. This would explain why they simultaneously respect and hate or annoy each other.

Reactions of characters without a close relationship to Katniss are surprisingly positive as well. After she volunteers as a tribute, Peeta's father brings her cookies. Madge, a friend from school, gives her the mocking jay pin: "Then she's gone and I'm left thinking that maybe Madge really has been my friend all along" (Collins 44). This quote indicates again that Katniss does not know how favourable others feel towards her. Peeta's mother has an especially strong opinion of her and shows more faith in Katniss than in her son:

'You know what my mother said to me when she came to say good-bye, as if to cheer me up, she says maybe District Twelve will finally have a winner. Then I realize, she didn't mean me, she meant you!' (Collins 104)

[Peeta's mother:] 'She's a survivor, that one.' (Collins 104)

Cinna tells Katniss that "[n]o one can help but admire your spirit" (Collins 140). The audience seems to adore both sides of Katniss, "that cheery, wavy girl on the chariot" (Collins 135) as well as the deadly fighter and decisive protector of her sister. The only openly hateful reaction towards Katniss stems from other tributes who are either jealous of her or regard her as a serious threat: "As I glance around, I notice a lot of the other tributes are shooting us dirty looks" (Collins 83).

Not a single character regards Katniss as gender-bending or gender-transgressing. Effie, for example, dislikes her defiant behaviour towards the Capitol. She is shocked by Katniss shooting at the roasted pig and consequently insulting the Gamemakers but not by the fact that she is able to shoot or to be aggressive. Haymitch, on the other hand, considers her shocking action amusing. As with Jo and George, other characters mostly criticize Katniss' temper rather than possible gender-related violations.

In terms of character development, Katniss does not change as fundamentally in the first book as Jo and George did. As mentioned before, she is much calmer and more balanced at the beginning, where she moves in a familiar

environment and is at home. The stressful burden of being a tribute and being located in a world of pretence, intrigue and unknown dangers makes her react more rashly, impulsively and emotionally. The most substantial change she undergoes is her attitude to intimate feelings and romance.

## 5.2. Historical Perspective

While wars in the previous centuries drew away attention from gender and equality issues, the Western world has experienced a comparably peaceful time, from the second half of the twentieth century onwards. Growing wealth and luxury, thriving economic developments and the notion of safety allowed more room for studies in matters of gender: “the genesis of women’s and gender studies is conventionally associated with what is described as ‘second wave’ feminism in the west in the period from the beginning of the 1970s” (Evans 604). These more intense deliberations on gender issues are paralleled by the fact that women who work or finish their studies have become the norm rather than the exception as well as in an even wider range of behavioural possibilities for both genders. Almost everything becomes possible, social norms are easing. Such radically changing notions of gender are reflected and further extended in literature. This can be observed especially well in *The Hunger Games*, which pictures a particularly gender-neutral future society.

The tomboy analysis of Katniss in the previous section was completely different to those of *Little Women* and *Five on a Treasure Island*. It was difficult because what was considered as tomboyish so far is no longer gendered in *The Hunger Games*. For many readers, Katniss might appear like a tomboy but she does not meet the established requirements because her environment in the novel does not offer gender norms for such a categorization. The tomboy term, which is solely defined by gender-boundaries and their transgressions, becomes redundant when those gendered differences disappear.

At the beginning of this thesis, it was established that literature mirrors reality. On the one hand, today’s society adopts a rather neutral and equal approach to gender, which we will label ‘modern.’ Simultaneously, society still harbours views of strict, prescribed gender roles which we will call ‘traditional.’ As such,

*The Hunger Games* can be read in two ways: by applying those 'traditional' gender conventions and by doing so turning Katniss into a tomboy who acts like a boy; or by accepting the 'modern' perspective, which makes Katniss a neutral human being bound by no gender constraints and therefore not fitting into the category of tomboy. It thus depends on the reader's approach to gender whether Katniss is regarded as a gender-transgressing tomboy or not gendered at all. The current section will try to explain this dichotomy between today's 'traditional' and 'modern' gender notions. Of course, in reality, there is a multiplicity of differing viewpoints on gender and reducing them to two opposing perspectives is a great simplification. It is however not feasible to work with more than these two simplified labels 'modern' and 'traditional' in this study.

Apart from the disparity between these two perspectives on gender, the novel is furthermore set in a future. Not a contemporary but a future manifestation of society and gender is presented that builds on 'modern' perceptions and develops them further, right up to complete gender-neutrality. It might be the case that the novel is meant to either present a utopian idea of 'modern' gender expectations or to have a didactic influence on society's 'traditional' perception. In both cases, it can be argued that Collins deliberately pictures a gender-neutral society and presents Katniss as a feminine as well as masculine heroine and a new modern woman who could serve as a gender-neutral role model for young readers. Simultaneously, Collins presents a variety of additional female characters. With these, she introduces 'traditional' female traits and illustrates that their values have worth, too, as well as various alternative and individualized ways for being a girl or a woman. With Peeta's character, she also establishes a male character who defies 'traditional' male gender roles and offers an alternative to prescribed norms of masculinity for boys or men. In the following, today's 'traditional' perceptions of gender will be presented as well as the rising possibilities of 'modern' womanhood.

Although the twenty-first century has become especially progressive in regard to gender and the inequalities it involves, 'traditional' expectations about gender-stereotypical behaviour are still deep-seated. In a Canadian study by Taber, Woloshyn and Lane, conducted in 2013, teenage girls were asked about their opinion on Katniss and Peeta. It is obvious that in those girls' perceptions,

gender norms of previous centuries are still valid. This means that for them, “males are under pressure to conform to expectations that they be powerful, handsome, muscular, capable, and unemotional while females are to be attractive, fragile, slim, caring, and emotional” (Taber, Woloshyn and Lane 1025). With these mental pictures in mind, the girls define Katniss as ‘manly.’

The girls identify Katniss’ character as more complex [...] indicating that she presented some characteristics and attributes that typically are categorized as traditionally masculine and others that could be characterized as traditionally feminine. (Taber, Woloshyn and Lane 1031)

When asked about whether Katniss was representative of women in their daily lives, they unanimously responded negatively. (Taber, Woloshyn and Lane 1033)

As explanations for their conceptions of Katniss being ‘manly,’ they named various of our well-known tomboy characteristics: acting like a boy, not caring about her looks, doing ‘boys’ stuff,’ being outdoors hunting and climbing rather than at home cooking and healing, enjoying physical activities, not being afraid, refusing to cry, being prepared to kill (Taber, Woloshyn and Lane 1031-2). Peeta, on the other hand, is not perceived as ‘manly’ at all:

The girls also rejected Peeta’s character as representing males in their daily lives, claiming that the majority of males they knew acted in manners consistent with hegemonic notions of masculinity. (Taber, Woloshyn and Lane 1034)

[T]he girls maintained that Katniss’ strength and willingness to participate in violence marked her as ‘more like a guy,’ while Peeta’s relative weakness and unwillingness to participate in violence marked him as ‘more like a teddy bear.’ Their responses throughout the book club demonstrate the pervasiveness and tenacity of the girls’ gendered beliefs as embedded in popular culture and society. (Taber, Woloshyn and Lane 1035)

These teenage girls have had no contact to cultural studies and receive their opinions about gender roles from their environment. This suggests that not all parts of society have changed their mindsets towards gender equality but rather retain ‘traditional’ beliefs.

The girls’ ‘traditional’ gender-expectations are disappointed at the very beginning of the novel, where Katniss reports that the city “is usually crawling with coal miners heading out to the morning shift at this hour. Men and women with hunched shoulders, swollen knuckles” (Collins 4). Men and women work in

the mines, an occupation traditionally connoted as solely male. A second disappointment for the girls must have been to hear Katniss say: “I never want to have kids” (Collins 11). A third of various gender-transgressions Katniss commits from the ‘traditional’ perspective is her preference of killing over healing: “Trust me. Killing things is much easier than this” (Collins 302), says Katniss when she has to treat Peeta’s wound. His response highlights her inverted gender-behaviour: “you’re kind of squeamish for such a lethal person” (Collins 302).

There are also incidents in which Katniss meets the typical gender conventions the teenage girls would have expected. However, it is noteworthy to say that in three out of six examples, Katniss puts on an act to impress her audience and win over sponsors. Those examples are:

Someone throws me a red rose. I catch it, give it a delicate sniff, and blow kisses back in the general direction of the giver. [...] Everyone wants my kisses. (Collins 81)

I stand on tiptoe and kiss his cheek. (Collins 83)

I’m also giggling, which I think I’ve done maybe never in my lifetime. (Collins 148)

In these three quotes, Katniss deliberately uses her femininity and girlishness to manipulate the audience and Peeta. The following two quotes present her as emotional, impulsive and weak. Katniss cries while burying herself into blankets: “[i]t takes at least an hour for me to cry myself out. Then I just lie curled up on the bed” (Collins 120); and throws around dishes: “then taking out my anger at Haymitch, at the Hunger Games, at every living being in the Capitol by smashing dishes around my room” (Collins 137). Those are two actions performed by women in popular culture but seldom by men. However, Katniss also exhibits moments of girlishly associated behaviour. First, when buying her sister a goat: “In a moment of complete giddiness, I bought a pink ribbon and tied it around [the goat’s] neck” (Collins 318). Second, when she expresses her enjoyment of her beautiful dresses (Collins 148). It should be clear by now why Katniss is regarded as showing feminine as well as masculine features by some readers. What has to be kept in mind is that her blowing kisses seems not to be regarded as a solely feminine gesture. A male tribute who wants to be perceived as sexy could do the same thing. A good example for a male

character who uses his sexuality to manipulate others is Finnick Odair in the second part of the trilogy.

Peeta's behaviour equally disappoints 'traditional' gender expectations – which supposes men to be “powerful, handsome, muscular, capable, and unemotional” (Taber, Woloshyn and Lane 1025) – as well as meeting such expectations. Although male characters are not the main focus of this thesis on tomboys, Peeta will be examined in regard to gender flexibility and femininity in male characters. His complexity will serve this thesis' premise that gender roles have changed over the last hundred and fifty years and are still changing, both for women and men. The following four quotes present Peeta as “more like a teddy bear” (Taber, Woloshyn and Lane 1035):

So I'm pondering the reason why he insists on taking care of Haymitch and all of a sudden I think, *It's because he's being kind. Just as he was kind to give me the bread.* (Collins 56)

Peeta is more patient, but I become fed up and surly. (Collins 115)

'I won't be much help with that,' Peeta says. 'I've never hunted before.' 'I'll kill and you cook,' I say. 'And you can always gather.' (Collins 346)

'What do I care? I've got you to protect me now,' says Peeta, pulling me to him. (Collins 367)

Peeta is characterized as caring, selfless, kind and patient, positive attributes that are still traditionally associated with women. He is also not capable of hunting, leading Katniss to tell him that he can cook and gather. In the last quote, Peeta states that Katniss is there to protect him. The latter two quotes are perfect examples for the couple's inverted gender-roles when regarded through a 'traditional' lens.

Peeta's masculine traits are interwoven with his feminine connoted characteristics. In contrast to Katniss, he is more in control of the couple's appearance in public as well as his feelings, he fights although it seems hopeless, he is courageous, he is capable of fighting the career tributes and therefore protecting Katniss, and he remains calm in dangerous situations:

I sense [Peeta] has a plan forming. He hasn't accepted his death. He is already fighting hard to stay alive. (Collins 69)

It's not that Peeta's soft exactly, and he's proved he's not a coward. (Collins 348)

'Not if Cato comes and kills you.' I tried to say it in a nice way, but it still sounds like I think he's a weakling. Surprisingly, he just laughs. 'Look, I can handle Cato. I fought him before, didn't I?' (Collins 371)

In the last quote, Katniss mistrusts his abilities but he responds with self-confidence. He proved that he can handle a duel with the most lethal tribute in the arena. This suggests that he is skilled in fighting and strong, two traditionally male connoted attributes.

The 'modern' perspective on gender regards men and women as equal and tries not to distinguish between typically male and female traits. As a consequence, women's and girls' positions are strengthened and their limitation to the private sphere is removed. This development lays more emphasis on women: "[n]ot only have girls become a public presence and interest, but there also is an increasing range of representations of them, their lives, and concerns" (Gonick 1). *The Hunger Games'* various representations of differing female characters mirror this trend. Furthermore, society has begun to "[celebrate] the fierce and aggressive potential of girls" (Gonick 7), which is labelled 'Girl Power' and is combining "girlish aesthetic with all that is most threatening in a female adult: rage, bitterness, and political acuity" (Gonick 7). Modern values for women are: self-determination, "[i]nner strength, authenticity, and being true to oneself" (Gonick 16). Young women hear that they can be whoever they want to be. This is "a powerful position from which to evaluate cultural representations of ideal femininity and to challenge and reject aspects of the available models of femininity that did not suit their own visions of themselves and their futures" (Gonick 16). However, these new values and developments are reserved for middle-class and upper-class rather than working-class women, who are still handicapped through their limited access to better education.

Michelle Bachelet, the Executive Director of UN Women and first female President of Chile, highlights and summarizes examples for the possibilities modern womanhood offers. In 2011, she reports that UN Women "was created, by public demand, to advance women's empowerment and equality" (Bachelet). She further announces:

I believe that we are all part of a major transformation that is taking place. The 21<sup>st</sup> century will be the century of girls and women. (Bachelet)

[E]veryone is learning that empowering girls and women is not just the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do. [...] I say seize this opportunity and go do things that your mothers and grandmothers could only dream of. (Bachelet)

This is however a social, economic and political revolution that cannot happen without men and boys. For gender equality and women's empowerment are only part of a larger journey for social justice and democracy. A journey for which your generation is better equipped than any generation before. (Bachelet)

According to Michelle Bachelet, society's awareness of women's potential increases and their opportunities grow. The vital variables in this gender revolution are every woman and man, as all have to seize their opportunities towards equality. Whether a person is able and willing to do so depends on their perspective on gender, among others.

In recapitulation, unlike with Jo and George, whether Katniss is regarded as a gender-flexible or even deviant tomboy or not depends on the mindset of the reader. Here, the dichotomy between 'traditional' and 'modern' gender notions of a person is of high significance. A 'traditional' woman who pursues the gender beliefs of previous generations will less likely embark on Bachelet's "larger journey for social justice and democracy." Like the teenage girls whose opinions were discussed earlier, this woman will define Katniss as a gender-norm breaking tomboy. A 'modern' woman will rather regard Katniss as a strong role model and an alternative to traditional female values. Katniss character represents modernity and gender-equity.

## 6. Conclusion

After establishing a tomboy working definition and a tomboy characterization grid in section 2, three novels featuring girls who show tomboy characteristics were investigated according to this definition, those tomboy attributes, and their historical contexts, in sections 3, 4 and 5. Simultaneously, three premises were taken as a basis for this thesis:

Literature parallels real-life developments and most of the real-life assumptions from the tomboy studies will be mirrored in the literary tomboy characters.

Time has changed gender-conventions and the perception of male and female connoted characteristics.

Gender norms develop into a stage where they are no longer important, which would render the term tomboy redundant.

Furthermore, five hypotheses were established about tomboys. On these grounds, with the empirical background of the tomboy studies and the literary analysis of tomboy characters, it is now possible to see whether the premises and hypotheses sustain comparison.

The first premise, that literature parallels real-life developments, can be confirmed. In order to be able to determine whether this was true, the novels were not only discussed in regard to society and characters within the story worlds but also compared to historical perspectives on gender. Both, Jo in *Little Women* and George in *Five on a Treasure Island*, correspond to gender expectations as well as gender-transgressions that were valid at the time of the novels' publication dates. Katniss in *The Hunger Games* only reflects the 'modern' approach to gender and even further elaborates its norms. It does not really parallel today's society's more 'traditional' perception of gender.

Deriving from that first premise, it was anticipated that most of the real-life assumptions from the studies in sections 2.1. and 2.2. will be reflected in the three literary tomboys. This premise is true for Jo and George but only partly true for Katniss. Jo meets all eight tomboy characteristics from the grid. George still meets six out of eight characteristics, with the exceptions doing 'girls' stuff' and gender flexibility. Katniss, on the other hand, only meets two characteristics – a preference of action, outdoors and sports as well as having male playmates

– when she is investigated in regard to the grid and society’s reactions in the novel; and those two categories even had to be changed or rather put into a different context to suit her. When compared to the perspectives on gender of today’s society, two different real-life viewpoints discussed in the previous section have to be taken into account: the ‘modern’ perspective which differs from the assumptions derived from contemporary studies on tomboys by disregarding gendered categories; and the ‘traditional’ perspective, which mirrors the studies’ gendered assumptions. Through the ‘modern’ lens, there is no need for a term like ‘tomboy’ as it does not work with prescribed gender roles any more. Within the ‘traditional’ perspective, Katniss meets various tomboy characteristics, like acting like a boy, a preference of practical apparel, doing ‘boys’ stuff,’ being outdoors and enjoying physical activities rather than staying at home (Taber, Woloshyn and Lane 1031-2). Therefore it can be argued that Katniss is both a tomboy and not a tomboy. In conclusion, out of the three novels, two and a half of our female protagonists reflect the tomboy categories developed in contemporary studies.

The second premise of this thesis has also been found to be true. It states that time has changed gender-conventions and the perception of male and female connoted characteristics. By investigating the three novels published in three centuries, with the first publication of *Little Women* in 1868 to the last publication of *The Hunger Games* in 2008, 140 years of tomboy history have been presented. It is clear now that time has decidedly changed gender norms by weakening them and by blurring the boundaries between masculine and feminine behaviour. Tomboy behaviour, which is defined as gender-transgressing behaviour, has first become more acceptable, then desirable, and finally a natural normal conduct for girls. Our three different tomboy characters, Jo, George and Katniss mirror that development. This change of gender perception can also be observed in the altering meaning of the term ‘boyish behaviour.’ While the defining criteria for tomboy have not changed significantly – a tomboy is still characterised as “a girl who behaves in a manner usually considered boyish” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary 2015) – the context has. Jo’s behaviour is considered as extremely tomboyish in the nineteenth century but would neither be characterised as such in the twentieth nor in the twenty-first century. In *The Hunger Games*’ context, Jo’s behaviour would not

even be gendered. Hence, the twenty-first century still uses the same tomboy definition as the nineteenth century but it regards only a few limited or even no conducts at all as boyish. Simultaneously, today's society partly stopped gendering certain activities, sports or practical apparel completely. Today's women have the right to fly planes, vote, wear trousers, occupy every job available, and choose careers over motherhood, opportunities Jo could only dream of a few generations earlier.

This thesis' third premise states that gender norms develop towards a stage where they are no longer important. If the development of gender conventions from *Little Women* to *Five on a Treasure Island* to *The Hunger Games* is taken as a reference, gender norms have indeed changed considerably. While the gender conventions in *Little Women* were highly important normative rules of conduct, they have decreased in *Five on a Treasure Island* in so far that George is accepted as one of the boys. The dystopian society in *The Hunger Games* has even reached a stage of the highest possible gender-equality. This is not only presented in this society's approach to gender but also in Peeta's character. His complexity as a man who combines attributes which are traditionally associated with women as well as men, exemplifies that gender norms have relaxed over the last hundred and fifty years and are still weakening, both for women and men. The couple's inverted gender-roles even strengthen these observations. Moreover, the investigations into 'modern' perspectives on gender-equality confirm these findings, too. However, the fact that *The Hunger Games* features a fictional future society and that this society has solely imagined gender values has to be kept in mind. The novel's concept of gender might be a symbol of today's emphasis on equality or it might be a didactic attempt to support gender-equality, but it is still fictional.

Tomboy behaviour has become normal, accepted, everyday behaviour for girls in the twenty-first century. In Morgan's study from 1998, she already predicts a weakening of perceptions of typically boyish or girlish behaviour. In the study from 2013 by Ahlqvist, Halim, Greulich, Lurye and Ruble, Morgan's observation is substantiated. Only a comparably low percentage of girls defined themselves as tomboys. Those decreasing numbers of tomboys in conjunction with a higher behavioural flexibility for women and girls suggest that traditionally masculine

connoted activities and characteristics are not seen as such any more. If *The Hunger Games* and its concept of gender are taken into account, it becomes perfectly clear that gender norms are of no importance in the world of the novel. Based on this thesis' observations of developments in the perception of gender boundaries and roles, it is now possible to say that today's western society has reached a very high level of gender neutrality, especially compared to those norms valid in the nineteenth century.

An addition to the third premise claims that if gender norms are no longer important, the term tomboy becomes redundant. This happens in *The Hunger Games* as its completely neutral gender approach renders the application of the term tomboy impossible. Due to the fact that society does not define gender differences, which are the sole defining basis for tomboys, the term turns obsolete within the novel. If nothing is considered solely boyish, girls cannot act tomboyishly. However, Katniss and her conduct were not only discussed in regard to the gender expectations in the novel's story-world but also against today's society's expectations. As stated in the previous section, it depends on the reader's approach to gender whether Katniss is regarded as a tomboy or not. Therefore, it has to be said that for one part of today's society, tomboy is no longer a required term while for another part tomboy may still be a valid concept. For the latter, there still exists a clear separation between male and female characteristics and activities, which means that gender-transgressions still exist, too, and with this, tomboys who commit gender-violations.

Turning to the first two hypotheses that were established, the application of the working definition and at least four defining criteria, it is possible to observe the same pattern as in the discussion of the premises. Jo and George meet both hypotheses, while Katniss either meets them or not, depending on the reader's approach: reading *The Hunger Games* through a 'modern' lens, the hypotheses do not apply; when regarding Katniss through a more 'traditional' lens, both hypotheses are met.

All three characters' tomboyish behaviour does not increase because of their family background or the losses of their fathers. Jo has already been a tomboy before her father left. George's opposition to her distanced father only increases her defiant behaviour but does not strengthen her tomboyishness. Katniss

learned hunting and arching from her father and only improves her proficiency when her father dies. She becomes a stronger, more exceptional character but might have continued to hunt with her father, had he not died.

The hypothesis that tomboys react more tolerantly towards out-group members because of their own experiences with being marginalized and their more flexible attitude towards social norms, only partly proves to be true for our three literary characters. Jo shows a significant amount of tolerance and insight and does not seem to condemn any character because of their behaviour. She regards herself as an outsider and therefore tries not to exclude others. George shows no signs of tolerance at all. Katniss identifies with the weak or suppressed but rather because she has experienced suppression herself and not because she seems especially tolerant towards out-group members. Therefore, it is only possible to confirm this hypothesis for Jo, not for the other two protagonists.

The last hypothesis, which was established because of Jo's aversion to the concept of dating, says that tomboys are interested in dating and romance later than their peers. This assumption applies to Jo but George is too young to be taken into account. Katniss is clearly not interested in dating or the concept of love, marriage and starting a family. In her case, this reluctance could be read as a hidden resistance against the 'traditional' way of becoming a housewife and mother. It could be a didactic device consciously adopted by Collins to weaken the belief that marriage is all a woman should strive for. Even as Katniss starts developing feelings for Peeta, she still dismisses them to avoid the 'traditional' consequences. Both, Jo and Katniss, first choose an alternative to husband and children and therefore provide role models for girls and women who do not want to commit themselves to life-long relationships. Although both characters conform to social conventions and marry in the end, this final hypothesis can be confirmed.

In conclusion, all three novels picture exceptional girls. These girls are exceptional because they are different from the usual and vanguards to gender developments. With them, their authors created role models which differ from the norm and serve didactic purposes, consciously or not. The tomboy is used as a means to break with socialization processes by presenting deviations from

the usual. If it is true that “male and female bodies are indeed different, but they are, for the most part, made that way by social practices and expectations of how girls and boys, women and men, should look and act” (Lorber and Moore 4), the tomboy offers a valuable alternative to these social practices. The tomboys’ androgynous state is “a utopian ideal for social change through which women could escape the place that normative society still assigned them and make full use of their talents and capabilities” (Mosse 188). All three characters become exceptional by living utopian ideas of gender and social conventions. Our “girls with options” (Ahlqvist et al. 576) are all an exception from the rule and help widen the opportunities and mindsets of their respective societies.

**37.886 words and 99 pages**

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## 9. Appendix

### 9.1. Deutsche Zusammenfassung

In dieser Diplomarbeit werden Veränderungen und Entwicklungen in der Auffassung von traditioneller Männlichkeit und Weiblichkeit anhand der ‚tomboy‘ Protagonisten in folgender Jugendliteratur untersucht: *Little Women* (1868), *The Famous Five on a Treasure Island* (1942) und *The Hunger Games* (2008). Es wird gezeigt, dass die Auffassung von geschlechtsspezifischen Normen heute nicht mehr so streng ist wie noch eineinhalb Jahrhunderte zuvor und dass geschlechtswidriges Verhalten von Frauen mittlerweile eher toleriert wird bzw. sogar als normal angesehen wird. Das 21. Jahrhundert hat einen sehr hohen Grad an Gleichberechtigung von Frauen und Männern erreicht. Diese Entwicklung wird deutlich in *The Hunger Games*, wo eine ausschließlich geschlechtsneutrale Gesellschaft beschrieben wird. Das Fazit dieser Arbeit ist, dass der westliche Kulturkreis sich laufend auf eine immer stärkere geschlechtliche Gleichberechtigung zubewegt, die Begriffe wie tomboy oder sissy hinfällig werden lässt, da solche Begriffe allein durch die Verletzung von Geschlechterrollen definiert werden.

### 9.2. English Abstract

This thesis examines the development of gender norms by investigating the phenomenon of the ‘tomboy’ in the following three books for young adults: *Little Women* (1868), *The Famous Five on a Treasure Island* (1942) and *The Hunger Games* (2008). It will be proven that gender norms are not as strict as they used to be and that transgressive behaviour in women is either more tolerated or not even exceptional any more. Gender developments even go so far that parts of today’s western society have almost reached gender equality. This becomes obvious in *The Hunger Games* which pictures a completely gender neutral society. This thesis comes to the conclusion that terms like tomboy or sissy become redundant when gendered differences disappear as these terms are solely defined by gender-boundaries and their transgressions.